The Palace Crumbles

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The Palace Crumbles

by TheCosmicPebble

Summary

After a long fall from the edge of a cliff, both Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham survive—but Hannibal suffers a massive head injury, leaving him with no memory of his life before the fall. It's up to Will to tell Hannibal everything, and what he includes (or doesn't include) in his stories will mark either the beginning or end of their new relationship.

First person POV Hannibal Lecter.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Float

The first thing I feel is something hard striking the back of my head. It slams right into the lower divot where my scalp meets my neck, and a firework of pain shoots through my spine. I am lucky, as I can still feel my limbs, but they are throbbing and freezing. I can feel them going numb with cold.

There is a colossal ringing in my ears. I can feel my brain pulsating inside of my aching head, and I cannot tell if my eyes are open or closed. All around me, there is nothing but darkness.

I float. And then I don't.

Solid ground against my back. I breathe, seeing stars no matter where I turn my head. I smell copper and salt.

My stomach flips. My heart pounds. I don't know where I am.

Someone— I will later realize it was you— lifts me off of the ground, and now I am flying, my limbs weightless yet made of concrete. I feel myself flop uselessly towards gravity, and my carrier struggles to hold me up.

Then I know that I am phasing. Ethereal. I am here, and then I am not. I am alive; I can feel a vein in my neck bulging up and down as someone presses cold fingers against it. I am dead; sleep is the easiest thing to do. I don't know how long I doze, but it's the only way to escape the pain.

Finally, after what feels like days of existing in this expanse of mystery and confusion, my eyes slowly flutter open.

I am laying in a medium-sized bed, with two hard pillows propping my head up. It is terribly dark in here, and I think to myself that I'm sick of the dark. I need to finally see.

There is a sole lamp on my bedside table, which I weakly reach for. My fingers fumble with the chain for a moment, unable to grasp it, but eventually it clicks on. A dim yellow light shines from it, only lighting up a small circle around me. It is enough.

I feel out of place. This room feels like a hotel: it is too cold, too intrusive. The blankets don't feel warm and cozy. They are stiff, and they absorb all of the cold air in the room. The mattress and the pillows are hard. It will be impossible for me to fall asleep once more in these conditions, and that's not even mentioning my pounding headache.

I'm shirtless, and my side throbs with pain. I reach down to touch it, and I feel a layer of gauze wrapping around my entire midsection.

Someone stirs next to me, and I nearly jump out of my skin. I haven't noticed I'm not alone.

My head swivels to the side, and I come face to face with a beautiful man. Absolutely stunning, you are. It surprises me. Even in the darkness, I can make out your defined cheekbones, the dark stubble that lines your jaw, your soft lips and long eyelashes. There is a patch of thick gauze on your cheek, stained a light pink.

You are peaceful in sleep, and I wish I could keep you that way. I stare at you, trying as hard as I can to stir up any kind of memory between the two of us.

I only come up blank.

Your eyes open. They are a striking light blue, the color of the ocean. Upon seeing me, your mouth drops open and your eyebrows disappear into the dark curls that lay across your forehead. Shocked, you examine me, your breathing becoming shallow.

You reach for me, wrapping your arms around me in a tight embrace. "Hannibal," you say to me. "Oh, my God. Hannibal!" You press your forehead against the side of my neck, kissing my throat and my shoulder. Your lips are parched, like you haven't left this bed in days. I don't object, even though you are a virtual stranger to me, because your affection feels nice.

I don't appear to be a stranger to you, though. The combination terrifies me.

"Okay, okay, wait." You brush my sweat-soaked hair from my forehead, holding a hand up in front of my eyes. "How many fingers?"

"Three."

"What's the capital of Lithuania?"

"*Vilnius*." It's a niche question, but the answer springs to my lips without me having to consider it.

"Good, good." You sigh in relief. "I think that's a good sign."

"What...what happened?"

"God. I'm sorry." You move up to my lips. You kiss me there, gently, and I make no move in either direction. When you pull away, you look slightly hurt, and it makes me wish I'd kissed you back. "I'm so sorry. Please don't be mad at me." You reach out to touch my face. "Look, I love you. I didn't realize it until last night, after...after everything that happened. But I love you. I love you so much, okay? And now we can—"

"Wait. I—" When I speak, my voice is pained and gravelly from disuse. I begin to cough, and you quickly reach past me for a glass of lukewarm water. You hand it to me, and we both hold onto it as I chug it down. I appreciate the gesture, as my hands aren't strong enough to hold the glass on their own. Yours are warm.

"I'm sorry," I finally reply. The empty glass gets set on the bed between us. "I don't...I apologize, but I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

As soon as the words leave my mouth, your face changes: first into exasperation, a twinge of anger creasing on your face, followed by a humorless chuckle and a roll of your eyes. "Come on, Hannibal." You frown at me. "Don't be like that."

"Like what?"

"Don't play games with me. You can't just act like our...relationship never existed." I notice how your cheeks flush at the word.

I blink, defensive. "I'm being completely serious, I swear! I don't know who you are. I don't know where I am, or what happened, or..." The realization dawns on me, and I feel my stomach drop. "I have no idea who I am."

That makes you stop in your tracks.

"What?" Your voice is so soft, it is a mere suggestion.

"I don't know who I am." Something deep inside of me shatters, struck by the epiphany. In that moment, I feel like an infant, born into this world with no sense of identity in their brains. I have started my journey over, after decades of building a life. "I don't remember anything before this moment right now."

Your eyes widen. Your beautiful face is a shocked mask for a moment, but it then crumples as your bottom lip quivers and your eyes fill with tears. It is such a tragic sight, seeing you cry, and that combined with the terror of amnesia blurs my own vision, too. I am a blank slate. I am nothing and no one.

"You don't know anything? Your name? My name? Anything that we...did together?" Your voice wavers.

I shake my head. "No," I whisper. "I'm so sorry."

"Hannibal. Darling." You shift forward to touch your forehead to mine. "Oh, no, no, no...*Hannibal*."

"You keep calling me Hannibal. Is that me?"

"Yes. Yes, your name is Hannibal."

It sounds foreign to me. I repeat it, and it sparks nothing inside of me. "And you?"

"My name is Will." You make no effort to stop the tears running down your cheeks. I find it admirable. "I'm Will, and...we love each other. We're a little obsessed with each other, honestly." You smile through the sadness. "And we took a little tumble. You must have hit your head. And now you can't remember anything."

"I remember floating. I think you carried me? And that's it."

You close your eyes for a moment. Then, without warning, a loud, shuddering sob escapes your lips, and your head falls forward against my collarbone. I feel your tears lingering on my skin.

"God. Shit." You grab tightly onto my forearm. "You'll never know how much I love you. The last thing you experienced...you must have thought that I hated you. You must have been so confused." You make a guttural noise. My heart pangs. "I never got to tell you I loved you."

Your words confuse me, and I know there are some parts of the story that are missing. I choose not to ask about them, however, as now would be a terrible time. You would simply dodge the questions.

"Will." I say your name for the first time. It grabs your attention. "It's going to be okay. It'll be okay." Despite my words, I can feel a lump rising in my throat. "I know now that you love me. That should be enough."

"It's not enough. It's not. Your old self will never know."

"Perhaps I can get that old self back. I suppose you'll have to explain some things to me."

"Our path in life is so absolutely absurd that I don't think you'd believe me. If you did, it would still take days for me to tell you."

"Well, we have time."

You hesitate. "Well," you say, deliberating on how much you want to tell me. I wait impatiently. "No. We don't have a lot of time."

"Why not?"

"I'm not sure how I'm supposed to explain it. We...we're on the run. Trying to avoid lots of people."

"Why? Are we in danger?"

You sigh. "I can't...we did some illegal things, Hannibal. Things that the rest of the world can never understand. And now they want us in prison."

"Prison?" The thought causes a lump to form in my throat. I can't go to prison— I feel like I just woke up. I feel like I was born mere minutes ago. I can't have my life snuffed out so quickly, not without knowing who I am first. "What did we do?!"

You don't respond. Instead, you let out a weak cry of frustration and grip the blankets tightly. You squeeze your eyes shut, thinking.

"Will, you don't have to be scared to tell me," I say to you. Your name feels easy. "I'll understand, okay?"

"Please come back," you moan. "Please, just...*remember*. You have to remember something."

"You have to give me something to work with." I try to remain patient. Surprisingly, I'm the calmer one in this situation; I wonder if that's how things always are. "You have to tell me about our past so I can remember it."

My words don't help. Another wave of grief hits you, and you cry into my chest. The only thing I know to do is hold you, and when I wrap my arms around you, you deflate. You nestle into my embrace like it's the most natural thing in the world, and right now, it feels that way. I immediately understand why my old self fell in love with you. It's impossible not to.

Finally, you shake your head and open your eyes, staring steadily into mine. You lick your lips.

"We're drug dealers," you say. "We've got a lot of money, a lot of business, that we're not supposed to have. And the FBI know our faces now."

Drugs. I nod. It could have been so much worse. I had already been imagining the worst-case scenarios, and this is honestly a breath of fresh air. "What happened to get us here?"

"We got into a conflict with the police, and you got shot." You gesture towards my bandaged side. "I promise, I tried my best to make sure it was all clean. I took the bullet out, and I disinfected it, and it's not bleeding as bad anymore."

"Wow." I blink. Out of all of the possibilities, I hadn't considered the fact that I'd been shot. "And your face?"

"Fell and scraped it real bad. Same time you hit your head. We fell, and it's all because of me."

"Wait, no—"

"It's all my fault," you continue. "It's my fault that we got hurt. That you hit your head. I got too careless while we were running, and we fell down this steep slope. There were lots of rocks." You sob. "It's all my fault. You're the one who knows everything, you're the one who takes care of all of the planning, and now it's all gone!"

"Will—"

"We don't have any money. We don't have any food. No phones, no friends, nowhere to live...they'll find us here, at some point. They know our names, our faces. Shit." More tears run down your face. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, Hannibal."

My heart begins to melt. Your guilt is palpable, and it makes me feel miserable too. I don't want you to blame yourself.

"No, Will," I say, "this isn't your fault. I...I don't know how long we've been partners, and I don't know what led up to this moment, but I know that I must have had a good reason for loving you." I touch your cheek, and I immediately realize that I've done it before. I recognize the warmth of your skin on my palm. "I still love you. There's no reason that it should change."

"We're going to have to run. As soon as possible." You place your hand on my chest. "I'd say we have about two days here tops. Are you feeling up for that?"

"I'm sure I'll be ready, once I get some more rest. Where do you plan on going?"

"I don't know. That was supposed to be your plan." You let out a little scoff of disbelief. "I think we need to take it some small steps at a time. We can't just hop on the next flight."

"Where's the final destination? The main goal?"

"Europe, preferably."

"Alright." I begin to think. "And where are we now?"

"Maryland. Baltimore."

Basic facts still easily surface in my brain; I know the geography of where we are. "I'm saying this out loud in case something happens to me and I forget again, okay? Keep it in your head."

You nod, eyes wide with interest.

"We need fake identities first. Do we know someone who can get us those?"

You stare blankly at me before shaking your head. "But I can try to find something."

"We're right by a big city. We can disguise ourselves, get a fake ID. We should then take a train up to somewhere more remote. New Hampshire, Maine, right up towards the top. Trains are less secure than flights. We can cross the border into Canada from there and fly into Greenland, then Europe. What country are you thinking?"

"Somewhere that the people definitely won't know our faces."

"Okay. We can figure that part out later."

"How the hell did you come up with that so fast?"

I shrug. "I don't know. It just..it felt natural. It was easy. I haven't forgotten my maps."

"We need money before we can do anything else. And I don't think we have any."

"How did we end up here?"

"You brought us here. You said you owned it."

"Alright. Then surely I've got something hidden around here. We can search the house top to bottom tomorrow. If there's nothing at all, then I suppose that's a sign?"

You close your eyes, exhaling shakily. "Yeah. It's a sign."

"We're going to get through this." I kiss your forehead. "It's going to be okay."

"We'll have plenty of time for me to tell you the full story. I promise, I'll get to all of it."

"Right now, I need rest. And I'm sure you do, too."

On cue, we both stretch our mouths open in yawns. We smile. I reach over to turn the lamp back off, and we are plunged into darkness.

It reminds me of my brain.

Money

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the long wait!! I've struggled to find motivation for this fic. I'm thinking of reuploading the remastered version of WRATH if that's something you guys would be interested in :)

In my dreams, I can hear a child screaming. A little girl, a sob in her throat, crying out in a language that I don't know— yet I understand. I know what she's saying.

She's begging for help. She's calling my name.

When I wake, the sun is streaming through the windows onto the wooden floor. It's blinding, and I squint.

You are changing my bandages. It's the pain that woke me, and now that I'm finally conscious, it intensifies. It's a burning feeling in my side, blistering pain that sends whiteness creeping into the sides of my vision. You stroke my hair as you rub a washcloth on the wound, and it makes me feel slightly better. I offer to help you change yours, but you insist that I rest.

"I'm worried about your head," you say. "I'm not entirely sure that you don't have a concussion."

"I feel okay."

"I just don't want to tire you out before we leave." You kiss my forehead before standing back up. "I'm still here. I'll just be looking around."

After a few minutes, you return with more water and a few bags. You sit next to me on the bed, and together we share a bag of dried peaches and a cereal bar. It gives me a nice little energy boost, both from the food and from your presence.

I drift in and out of sleep until I hear you cry out from somewhere else in the house. It jolts me into action, and I'm about to spring out of bed when I hear your footsteps coming.

"Will?" I wince from the movement of sitting up. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry." You run up to the bed and grab my face, kissing me on the lips. "You're a fucking genius. You saved our asses."

"What? What did I do?"

You smile and hold up a plain envelope. Inside is a large stack of $20 bills, along with four driver's licenses. All of them have different names and different faces, and they don't expire until next year.

"You knew what you were doing when you brought us here," you tell me. "You've had this ready for years. The food, the money, the IDs. I think there's debit cards in here, too. God, Hannibal." You laugh, giddy. "I mean, this has got to be at least a thousand dollars."

I watch with a smile of my own as you count out the money. I like how you make stacks of five bills, separating them by groups of one hundred so they're easier to count.

"One thousand, two hundred." You bury your face in your hands. "God, this is a life-saver. We might actually be able to do this."

"Are the IDs okay? Can we pass for them?"

"These two are the closest to us, I think." You show me two of the IDs: one shows a man with silver hair and glasses, and another shows a man with a sharp jawline and a buzzed haircut. I glance up at you with an expression of dread; I can't stand the thought of sacrificing your curls.

"I'll make it," you say, reading my mind. "It'll grow back. What matters is looking the part. And I can't look anything like myself."

"Do we even have a razor?"

You stand wordlessly and go into the bathroom. After a moment, I hear you laugh. "Jesus, Hannibal."

"What?"

"You've got an electric razor, multiple shades of hair dye, glasses, makeup...how long have you been prepping this?" You pause. "Wait, you wouldn't— never mind. It must have been a while, though."

A sliver of doubt begins to form in my mind. You're right: I thought of everything we ever could have needed. And, to be frank, this feels like overkill for something as simple as drug dealing. That is, unless we're the leaders. The bosses. But that seems unlikely.

I push it aside as you give me a Tylenol and lead my into the bathroom. I sit in the shower, naked, and you rub silvery dye into my hair. It makes the room smell oppressively of chemicals.

"Have we done this before?" I ask. You shake your head, biting your lip.

"We've never had to run like this before."

"How did we get caught?"

"I don't know for sure." You shrug. "I guess we got careless."

I look down at my hands. I'm not wearing a ring, and I haven't noticed one on your finger, either. "How long have we been...together? Romantic?"

"Officially? Not long. Unofficially, probably around four years." You chuckle. "We were in denial for a long time."

"Fell in love with your partner in crime?" I can't help but smile.

You sigh. "..How could I not have?" You ask, and it doesn't sound rhetorical. It sounds like you are actually asking yourself, blaming yourself for not falling in love earlier.

"Will," I say, "if me losing my memory...if it makes you not want to be with me anymore, I understand."

"What? No. No, I'm not leaving you." You squeeze my shoulder, leaving grey streaks on the towel draped around me. "Not after everything we've been through."

I wonder what everything means.

"Your hair. Oh, your pretty hair."

You run your hand through your newly buzzed hair. You look like you're about to join the military. "I don't think it's that bad. It'll grow back."

"But I liked your curls. They felt nice."

You smirk, reaching for the pair of costume glasses on the counter and slipping them onto my face. "And I liked when you didn't look like an old librarian. But we all have our opinions."

We examine ourselves in the mirror. You look nearly unrecognizable, with your short hair and brown contacts to hide the beautiful blues. I, however, don't notice much of a difference; when I looked at myself before, I didn't recognize my own face. It is easy to switch to a new face when you haven't gotten used to the old one yet.

My grey hair makes me feel old. You look so much younger compared to me.

"How old am I?"

You turn your head to look at me, eyes full of bewilderment that quickly fades once you remember my predicament. "Um...late forties, I'm pretty sure?"

"You don't know?"

"You never told me specifically."

I gaze down at the floor, brow furrowed. How in the world could we have been in love for so long without you even knowing my age?

"It's a long story, Hannibal," you eventually say. "We'll have time to talk about it soon, once we're on the move. Let's figure this out, okay?"

"Well, we have twelve hundred dollars and a basic route. We need a computer or something — to help us look up train or bus rides."

"You didn't have your phone, and I destroyed mine. I think there was a laptop in the office here. Let me look."

I follow you around the house, watching you rifle through the drawers of a bare light oak desk. You grin and pull out a bulky laptop, a few years out of date, and open it. Tapping your fingers against the keys in anticipation, your face suddenly falls and you groan.

"Fuck. Password-protected."

"An amnesiac's nightmare." I come around to your side of the desk, staring at the empty box with a blinking cursor, taunting us. "Anything you can think of that means a lot to me?"

"I mean, a few things. But...I don't know." You hunch forward and type a few combinations in: WillGraham, willgraham, willG. None of them work. I take note of your full name for later, hoping to research ourselves once we get somewhere safer.

"Pets?" I ask. "Siblings, hobbies, places—"

"Wait."

You type in Mischa, and the computer unlocks.

"Your sister," you tell me, as if that is the only information I could ever need. I think of the child in my dreams, crying out for someone to help her.

You search for train tickets, putting in our current location with a goal for Scranton, Pennsylvania. "Okay, this would be about two hundred bucks for both of us. Leaves here in a couple of hours and stops in Philly before getting us to Scranton."

"Would we be able to get to the station in that amount of time?"

"Yeah. I know where it is. And if something goes wrong and we end up missing it, we can buy tickets to another train." You close the computer after making sure that the browser history is clear. "I'm not buying it online; I'd rather do cash. We can drive over there and play it by ear.

"Smart. Only issue is that we don't have a car."

"Oh, don't worry." You smirk knowingly. "We do."

Car

Distance from Baltimore to Trenton Transit Center: 130 miles (2 hours 15 min)

We haven't even started the journey yet, and our plans have changed.

The detail of a car has made me rethink a few things. It would be better, we decide, to travel up to New Jersey or Pennsylvania before getting on a train— we can't drive around in a damaged cop car for long before someone notices and calls it in. We need the disguises and the shorter distance combined in order to feel the safest.

You lead me down the rocky embankment onto a road that spirals up the slope of the cliff. On it lies an abandoned police car, banged up and smeared with a dark powder on the side. You pull a set of keys from your pocket and unlock the car like it's your own, sliding into the driver's seat.

"How did this happen?" I ask you as I settle into my own seat.

"Very long story."

You have to drive all the way back up to the house in order to find enough space to turn around. The road is narrow and precarious, and you drive slowly.

"We've got hours of driving ahead, Will. I think you have time to tell me some things."

You drum your fingers on the steering wheel. "There was a bit of a brawl between us and the police. We won."

"That's a very short story."

"Okay, look, there's a lot of horrible, violent things that have happened these past few years. I don't want to scare you off by telling you, or overwhelm you, or something."

"I'm an adult. I can handle myself." I feel defensive, like I have to prove that I'm not a child. "Memory doesn't equal maturity."

"Then you're gonna hear some bad things about both of us, okay?"

"Okay."

"So. About five, six years ago, I was addicted to pills. Broke and homeless, working right at minimum. It was a really bad time of my life, and...I hate talking about it." You swallow. "My old dealer moved away, and instead of taking that as a sign I started looking for a new one. Travelled up to Baltimore— I lived in Virginia— and I found you."

"And I was dealing? I thought you told me earlier that I was a doctor."

"You were. But you dealt like crazy. And no one would have expected it. You were rich, popular, professional. It was the perfect cover." I try to imagine myself, years after earning a doctorate, standing in a dark alley toting pills and cocaine, but the idea is so absurd that I can't give it any extra thought. "And when you saw me, you said that it looked like I could use a job."

"Really?"

"You wanted me to be your middleman. Help sell some product and get my own cut of the profits. Which, with the stuff you were selling, was a lot more than minimum wage."

"Why was I selling when I already had everything I needed?"

"You told me it was for power. For some more sense of control."

"Well, that's fucked up."

You bark out a laugh. "It sure is."

"How did everything play out, then?"

"A lot of years of sneaky dealing. At the end of every month, you insisted on coming by my house yourself to give me the money. It was probably an hour and a half drive, and you did it anyway."

"Because I liked you?"

"You said you were fascinated by me. You'd ask me to tell you stories, like I was a jester or something. Two opposite sides of the financial spectrum, just..seeing how the other half lived."

I'm afraid to say anything, but the entire story rubs me the wrong way. It's something about the way you tell it, full of confidence and lacking sentimentality. This is someone else's story, a plot line of a novel, not something that you have lived through.

However, I also don't want to believe that you would lie to me. The thought makes me nervous.

"And we fell in love?" I ask you.

"At some point down the line." You shrug.

"Will..." I turn to look out my window and watch dead trees fly past us. "This doesn't feel right. I just...none of this feels right."

"What do you mean?"

"Your story. It doesn't make any sense."

"How does it not make any sense? It's the truth." Your voice cracks, and you clear your throat. "Do you not trust me?"

"I do trust you, but I can't help but wonder. Can you please just tell me the truth?" I close my eyes, feeling slightly carsick. "Just tell me who I am. Please?"

You are quiet for what feels like hours. I only head the humming of the car, the tires against asphalt. I lean my head back and refuse to look at you, waiting and waiting.

"Hannibal Lecter," you say. "You're Hannibal Lecter."

"That name means nothing to me."

You pause before eventually pulling the car over, turning off the engine and leaning your forehead against the steering wheel. I let you process your emotions, suddenly terrified of what's about to come out of your mouth.

"You're a murderer. You're a serial killer," you mutter, "and so am I."

This shuts me up. I look down at my hands, clenched in my lap, and I wonder what I've done with them. I look over at you, the heavy bags under your eyes. I look out the window.

"Keep driving," I tell you. You finally straighten up, brow furrowed.

"Hannibal—"

"Just keep driving. Please."

You obey without protest.

"That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard," I scoff after a long and uncomfortable silence. "Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"I don't— what? No, Hannibal, it's true."

"Just like you said the drug thing was true? God, Will, I'd honestly be more inclined to believe the drug thing than whatever you're trying to spew at me now. Who do you think I am?"

"I promise, I'm being serious this time. You have to believe me." Now you sound genuinely frantic. "I won't lie to you again, okay? I was just worried about how you were going to take the news—"

"I'm not taking it well. There's your answer. Do you really expect me to believe that we are both serial killers, living in the same vicinity and acting at the same time, and neither of us have been caught up until now? Do you realize how rare that is?"

You bite your lip. "I don't..." You reach for the radio dial that sits between us, subjecting us to the staticky announcements from other policemen. There's a lot of pointless rambling, reciting numbers and other sorts of codes. Then, I hear a word I recognize.

"...Trying to get a handle on the Lecter-Graham situation," a burly voice announces. "We've got three cars and six officers missing— all presumed dead. So far no leads on where the

suspects have gone. Consider them armed and extremely, extremely dangerous. They will kill on sight; we're waiting to hear if we should shoot on sight."

The man then goes on to list more names and numbers, the identities of the missing officers reduced to meaningless code on a radio. My throat has closed up, and I stare ahead at the windshield.

"I'm sorry," you say quietly. "I'm sorry. This is what I didn't want to happen. That's why I lied. I'm sorry."

"You have a lot to explain to me, Will."

"I know. I know, and I will. I promise, I'll tell the truth. I just didn't want to scare you away, or upset you...it's a massive thing to just drop in your lap, and—"

"I understand. But please," I grit my teeth, "tell me that your acts of love aren't fake. Tell me you meant them."

"Yes, of course. I meant every bit of it." You sigh. "That's the sliver of truth in all of this."

"If I catch you lying like that again, I'm running away as soon as we've safely arrived in Europe. I'll be out of your sight for good. Understand?"

You nod, apologizing once more. "I don't want to lose you, Hannibal. I really don't."

"Then you need to lay everything out for me. You need to tell me the truth."

"I've already dropped one bombshell on you. Can I tell you things little by little?"

"As long as it all gets out there eventually."

"It will. I promise."

You reach over with your free hand and grab onto mine, and our fingers are laced together throughout the entire drive.

Eat

Trenton Transit Center, Trenton, NJ

$1,200.00

"What's your name?"

"Joseph Curran. My name is Joseph Curran." I take one last look at myself in the sunshield's mirror, adjusting my glasses. "Seventeenth of August, 1970. And yours?"

"My name is Gabriel Holloway. December twelfth, 1979." You run a hand through your buzz cut. You've parked the police car in the lot of an abandoned garbage dump, the smell already seeping in through the cracks in the doors. We plan to walk a mile to the train station, buy the soonest tickets we can get, and take off. We're headed for Vermont, then Montréal. We have false passports in the names we've just described, IDs, and medical face masks to cover ourselves. We'll probably have to take them off at customs, but it's better than having the entire public witness our faces.

We walk fast, hands in our jacket pockets. Breathing with the mask makes my glasses fog up, creating a gross humidity that lingers on my upper lip. "Here's something small," I say to distract myself. "Tell me what really happened to your face. Because I don't think you scraped it in a police chase."

"That is the exact opposite of small." You sigh. "I'll tell you the whole story later, but...we both got into this fight with a violent criminal. He cut my face with a knife. Just like he shot you."

I'm reminded of my wound. My body is being surprisingly resilient— I haven't taken much notice to any pain. I walk a little heavier on my right side, though, and I'm hoping it's not glaringly obvious. We'll have to keep changing the bandages once it's safe.

"So are people going to know to look for a big scar on your face?"

"No. The guy is dead. No one knows that he cut me, because no one is around who witnessed it."

"I see." I ponder this. "Is he dead because of the police, or because we killed him?"

You blink hard, lost in a memory. "We killed him," you say softly, almost with nostalgia.

"Was it nice?" I'm not sure where the question comes from.

You look at me in surprise. "..Yes," you reply. "It was beautiful."

I long to feel the way you do, in this moment. To gaze in awe at a memory, to share it with you. I want it more than anything in the world. It's as though my mind does not remember you, but my heart does. We are connected by a string between our chests, heart to heart, soul to soul.

The grief rolls over me. I want to remember. I want to remember.

"You okay?"

I blink, and a tear rolls down my face. "I hope that I can cherish that beauty with you soon. I really, really hope so."

"Me too." You smile sympathetically, looking around for anyone watching us before taking my hand. "I'll tell you the whole story later."

We spend the rest of the walk in comfortable silence, but when we reach the transit center we are thrust into a bustling plaza. People are everywhere, and I immediately feel my chest tighten. I look over at you, and I can tell that you're feeling the same way.

"It's easier to get lost in the crowd," you say. "Everyone will just look past us. It's okay." You're trying to reassure both of us.

You grip onto the end of my sleeve as we walk towards the ticket counter. We wait in line with our heads bowed, waiting for what feels like hours but, according to the massive clock, is only about fifteen minutes. When our turn is coming up next, I feel my stomach flip.

The man behind the stall is harried and exhausted, dark circles under his eyes. He simply processes our request without asking for any ID. "I don't got nothin' for Maine until two days from now," he says gruffly. "All booked."

This doesn't phase you. "What about Canada? Montréal?"

"Got a Quebec leaving in three hours. That's it."

"We'll take that." You reach for the envelope of cash that you have tucked away in your backpack, and you hand over the $435 that he wants for the tickets. He takes it, nods, and sends us off.

We both sigh in relief as we walk away, relishing the fact that this was much easier than expected. You smile.

"Shit happens. But hey, now we've erased a step. Who needs Maine?"

"Not us."

"Okay." We look up at the massive board that displays the train schedules. "Two hours, forty-nine minutes until the train to Quebec boards. That's," you glance at the clock, "about five or so."

"That's a long time," I remark without thinking, taking in all of the people around me. Conversations all blend into one wall of noise, and metallic screeching collides with the rattling of wet coughs. It's light, air, and color, and none of it is pleasant.

You glance over at me. "You wanna get out of here?"

Starbucks, Trenton, NJ

$732.83

"Good?"

"Hm?" I look up from my sandwich, which I have already halfway devoured in minutes. Maybe it's the lack of food in the past two days, maybe it's the relief, maybe it's anxiety, but I am suddenly ravenous. I'm glad to have something actually filling inside of my stomach.

You are smirking. "If anyone told me that you of all people would be eating and enjoying fast food..." You shake your head, picking up your own sandwich. "I wouldn't have believed them."

"So I'm a bit of a snob?"

"A bit. But in a good way." You lean conspiratorially close to me, despite the fact that we are tucked away in a corner booth and surrounded by people. "You are certainly a patron of the arts. You're really talented. You can draw, paint, play a couple of instruments, dance, write, speak a bunch of languages...you're a prodigy. But the best part is your cooking. God, your cooking."

I smile at your praise. "What kinds of things would I make?"

"Really fancy stuff. Ingredients I'd never even heard of, more like art than a plate of food."

I wonder to myself if now all of my talents are going to waste. Would I still have the muscle memory to hold a paintbrush, to position my fingers over a harpsichord?

I blink. *Harpsichord*. What a niche instrument for my brain to immediately jump to.

An image overwhelms me. I'm in a dark room, my well-manicured hands plinking out a tune on a harpsichord. Sheet music lays in front of me, but the contents are all a blur of unintelligible black ink. A woman sits next to me, faceless, with dark hair flowing down to the turquoise straps of her dress. I don't know who she is.

She leans in to kiss me, and I don't want it.

"Hey." Your voice snaps me out of the memory. "You okay?"

"I..." I stare down at the plastic tabletop. A faint, sticky ring from someone else's drink has seeped into the material. "I think I just remembered something."

"You did?" Your eyes widen. "Oh, my god, what was it?"

"It was just me. I was playing a harpsichord. And there was a woman. With brown hair."

You nod, excited, but I can tell that you were expecting something much bigger. "Yeah. Yeah, you play harpsichord. I'm glad you remembered that. And the woman...that's probably Alana. Alana Bloom."

"Who is that?"

You pause for a long time. I can hear a baby whining at one of the other tables. "Okay, this is kind of convoluted, but we've got time. So...I worked for the FBI before we met. I was a professor at the Academy. Alana knew about me, and she had always been interested in talking to me— not for friendly reasons, but so she could analyze me." You frown. "I have a pretty unique talent, too, that she really wanted to pry information about from me.

"My boss, Jack— his name is important— wanted me to help him with a criminal case. The issue is that I needed a psych evaluation before I could get on the case, so Alana recommended you. She was your coworker many years back."

"Okay."

"There's a lot of the story that I'm skipping past, but the two of us...we have a really complicated relationship," you say, "and that's putting it lightly. I liked Alana. I felt things for her romantically, but she didn't want me. She chose you instead. And you weren't interested in her, but you let her do it anyway just so you could manipulate me."

I raise my eyebrows. "I did that to hurt you?"

"You wanted me to know that you were winning."

"And what game were we playing?"

"Hannibal." You say my name softly and intimately. "Our entire relationship is a game of cat and mouse. It's predator and prey, and our roles switch up at any moment. We have spent literal years manipulating each other." You lean back in your chair, seemingly exhausted. "I feel like if you gave me a year, I still wouldn't be able to finish the story."

"And somehow through all of this, we fell in love?"

"Yes. And that's half of the reason why we kept toying with each other. Because we were afraid to admit what it really was. Who we really were." You shrug. "To an outsider, it just

seems like we're psychos. Folié a deux. And that's why it's hard to explain things to you, because...right now, at least, you're an outsider."

This should hurt, but it's only the truth. "I feel like," I swallow, "I feel like there's something else crucial that you're leaving out. There's some big chunk missing from this, apart from the story that you're not telling."

You scoff. "You're still as observant a psychiatrist as ever." Your eyes dart around the cafe as you make sure no one could possibly hear what you're about to say. "I don't know if you're ready to hear this."

"I already know that I've killed people. There's not much worse."

"Well..." You bite your lip. "You're a really talented chef, Hannibal. You have access to all of these exotic meats I've never had before. Ox, wild boar...long pig." You give me a meaningful expression. "Jack always asked where he could find your butcher. You never told him your secret resource."

It hits me. I've already finished eating, and my stomach toils at the thought of what you're suggesting. Surely I'm misunderstanding. Surely. I cannot speak, the cotton in my brain travelling down to my throat and choking me.

"I'm sorry," you say. "But it's a pretty important part of this story. It's something you needed to hear from me."

"I ate them," I whisper as quietly as possible. "I ate them."

"You did."

I quickly bolt up from my chair, startling you, and weave my way between tables towards the restroom. I can feel you following me, but I pay you no mind— I shut myself in the small

room and close the door behind me. The room is luckily only for one person, so I have a fragile privacy.

It's not long before you come in after me, though, locking the door behind you. "Hannibal," you say tentatively, as if confronting a vicious animal, "it's okay."

"It's not." My stomach churns in disgust once more. "I kill people, and I eat them." I shudder. "I cook and eat them, like some kind of savage."

"I...you don't understand. I never thought our roles would be reversed, but here we are." You approach me, placing a hand on my shoulder. "When I found out who you were, the actions you'd committed, I acted just like you are now. I was disgusted. I shoved it away, and I tried to have you caught.

"But you...you were like me right now. Calm. Approaching the situation with an entirely different viewpoint." You lean in to kiss my neck, and I watch our revolting display in the water-stained mirror. "You had your own twisted reasonings, and you showed them to me. And after a while, I embraced them."

My blood boils. I am on the verge of vomiting up every morsel of food I just devoured. I cannot stand to be near you anymore.

"No. Stop this." I push away from you. "You need to tell me the whole fucking story right now. You need to stop being so cryptic, stop giving me non-answers and trying to trickle in information a little at a time. Tell me what's going on right now, or else I'm going to assume that you're lying to me."

"Hannibal—"

"Is that even my name? Or are you trying to stop me from going to any kind of authorities?" Without thinking, I shove you, and you stumble back against the wall. "For all I know, you've kidnapped me, and you're trying to usher me away from anyone who could find me. What sort of excuse do you have for that, Will?"

You stare defiantly into my eyes, silent for close to a minute. Neither of us waver, not until you slip out from under my grasp and dart out the door.

Paper

Starbucks, Trenton, NJ

$732.83

My first thought is that I'm finally free. I imagine myself fleeing from this terrible building, taking myself to the nearest police station and finally getting some real idea of who I am. Perhaps I have a family I can return to. Perhaps this can all be a distant memory.

But you return before I can even entertain the idea. You are carrying a newspaper, which you shove at my chest and leave me to catch. I fumble with it, glancing down at the page that you have flipped to.

Our faces stare up at me. Both pictures of us are mugshots.

I stare myself in the eyes, realizing how flat they are. I look like a husk of a being, like I was not even present when the picture was taken. You, on the other hand, look livid. Your brow is lowered as you glare up at the camera.

HANNIBAL LECTER ESCAPES; WILL GRAHAM THOUGHT TO BE WITH HIM

"That's what I have to say," you tell me. You cross your arms. "Read it. I'm curious what you'll have to say."

Embarrassed, I begin to read.

Early yesterday afternoon in Virginia, the body of Francis Dolarhyde was discovered on a cliffside overlooking the Atlantic. Dolarhyde is thought to be the culprit behind multiple murders in the area, dubbed under the nickname "The Tooth Fairy."

The apprehension of Dolarhyde comes with a cost, however. Prolific serial killer Hannibal Lecter is said to have escaped from his confines of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where he was serving multiple life sentences. Lecter has confessed to dozens of murders under the pseudonym "The Chesapeake Ripper," although he is thought to be the culprit of upwards of a hundred deaths. He is most notorious for cannibalizing his victims, with many christening him "Hannibal the Cannibal."

Will Graham, an FBI profiler with a complex history with Lecter, has been reported missing and is thought to be travelling with Lecter. Graham was arrested years ago under suspicion of murder before later being proved innocent— he claimed that Lecter framed him for everything. Both men are considered to be armed and extremely dangerous. Report any information to the FBI tip line below or local police.

I am left speechless. I do not recognize the man printed on the paper, his lips curled up in a minuscule smirk. If that is me, then am I even myself anymore if I cannot remember a moment of it?

I am a cannibal. That is my face. I am the culprit of upwards of a hundred deaths. I am armed and extremely dangerous.

"...Tell me about this," I say, pointing to the paragraph that details your arrest. It's the only thing I can think to say, as it's too difficult to process any of the information about myself. I feel like a different person, staring in on this situation from the outside. I am a fly on the wall.

"I will, if you come sit back down with me."

I shake my head. "People are going to see us. If we're this dangerous, this notorious— we're in a building where our faces are on the newspaper mere feet away, for God's sake."

"That's what the disguises are for. And who the hell reads the newspaper anymore? No one is going to notice us."

I want to object, but there's a part of me that wouldn't mind being caught. From the looks of this article, I absolutely deserve to be cuffed back up and sent to my cell once more. It wouldn't be a tragedy upon this world if I wasn't in it.

So I go along, not with the hope of being noticed, but with the indifference to make it not matter either way.

We exit the bathroom as normally as we possibly can, depositing the newspaper in the trash and making our way back to the little table in the corner. We settle in, and I stare down at the table as you move your chair directly to my right instead of across from me. You run your hand over your buzzed hair again.

"Like I said," you begin, "when we met at first, I had no idea who you were. You were my psychiatrist, just some man that I had to get to know. We were investigating these murders, and the cases weren't kind to me." You frown. "I have autism. Okay? Just getting that out of the way. And I've got some kind of hyper-empathy. It made me a vital part of the investigations, since I could easily dive into the mind of any killer just from looking at the crime scene."

I admire your bluntness. "Okay."

"I started getting sick. I was having panic attacks, migraines, hallucinations. I was losing time — blacking out for long periods of time and waking up somewhere else with no memory of how I'd gotten there. I told you about all of these things, and you sent me to a neurologist. They did an MRI, and it was viral encephalitis. Basically a virus burning up my brain and eating away at it."

"God."

"I know. And you found this information out...and you refused to tell me." You avert your gaze. "You charmed the doctor into telling me that my results were fine, because you wanted to toy with me. You made me believe I was going crazy, that I could have done some terrible things during my blackouts. You started framing me for your crimes, because my memory loss made a perfect mechanism for me to be the killer."

"I..what? You had that and I didn't tell you?" I can hardly imagine myself being so heartless. "How are you alive?"

"It eventually got bad enough that my coworkers had to take me to the hospital. By 'bad enough' I mean that I stalked one of the criminals we were trying to catch and shot him in the gut." You rub your temple as I look at you in shock. "I found out later on, once I got a lot of my memory back, that you were making my encephalitis worse."

"*Worse*?!" It strikes me that I am literally the most unlikable person ever.

"You were giving me what you called 'light therapy'. It was just a way to trigger my seizures." You roll up your sleeve, exposing your left inner elbow. It is covered in small dotted scars. "While I was out, you injected a few different mixtures of hypnotics into my arm and convinced me that I had done all of these terrible things. And I got sent to jail."

"Was there any evidence at the scenes that proved you couldn't have done it?"

"You knocked me out at one point and shoved a victim's ear down my throat through a tube." You nearly laugh at the absurdity. "I threw it up a few days later, and everyone thought I was the cannibal. It was just the right amount of evidence to prove what they already suspected of me."

There's so much of me that wants to challenge all of this, to fight back, but the entire story is so insane that I feel it's impossible to make up. I find myself reaching for your arm, examining the pinprick scars that line the veins. I feel the hair on your arm graze my palm, and

and I am in a dark office. I'm cradling your arm just like this, a white light flashing aggressively behind me. In my right hand I hold a syringe, and I maneuver the needle into your vein. I glance up at your face, and you are not yourself. You are covered in sweat, eyes rolled in the back of your head, trembling, crying, seizing, and

and I am here. There is no needle. There are only scars. You're telling the truth.

"...An apology can never be enough," I say, defeated. "Nothing will ever be enough."

"This is enough." You gently pull your arm away from me, instead placing your hand on my knee. "I'm not innocent, Hannibal. I hurt you, too."

"But I've hurt you more. You've hurt me with intangible things, and all I've done is drug you and *stab* you and...I don't know." I trail off, unsure where these words have come from. They don't have a specific memory attached to them— I am simply certain that they are true. When they spring to mind, I'm thinking of the words as metaphorical, but the look on your face makes me think that they may not be.

"I didn't tell you about the stabbing," you say, shocked. "How'd you find that out, Hannibal?"

"I— I don't know. I just said it. Did that actually happen?"

After a moment's hesitation, you nod. I scoff, burying my face in my hands.

I am a sick, disgusting person. I am repulsive.

"How about we talk about this later?" You say. "We'll have to get going soon."

I ignore you. "Tell me why you stayed."

"Why I stayed?"

"Why you're here right now. With me. After everything."

You heave a sigh. "It's hard for you to understand right now. But..you have the most beautiful mind in the world. It's a palace in there." The side of your mouth turns up. "Your train of thought, your ideas, your emotions and your words...oh, they're so beautiful, Hannibal. Everything has so much grace. So much sophistication. Your brain is a work of art."

"I don't have any of that anymore, Will. I'm a blank canvas now." I feel a stinging behind my eyes. "Who am I, if not that mind?"

"You're still mine." You lace our fingers together. "And I think we have a good chance of at least getting something back. Amnesia can be short-lived."

"And if we don't? Are you okay with that, Will?"

"Yes."

I nod, but all that I can think about is the moment of silence before your answer. The second that felt like hours, the second in which you had to contemplate your true feelings.

Girl

Trenton Transit Center, Trenton, NJ

$732.83

We board the train with no setbacks.

We choose a seat towards the back, and you let me sit by the window. I fight the urge to pull down my mask, reminding myself that it's one of the only things keeping my true identity safe. To grow complacent would be foolish. One success is not indicative of another.

The train is rather crowded, with only a few open seats left once everyone has boarded. I realize that, even over the loud chugging of the engine, it would be much too risky to talk to each other. Someone could listen in very easily if they tried. I sigh. It just means more waiting for the answers that I'm desperate for.

You tap my shoulder. When I look over, you have the newspaper in your lap, a black pen in your hand. You begin to write in the margins, then reconsider, glancing around at the many watchful eyes that surround us. In front, behind, to our left. Too many ways to be seen.

Instead, you begin to circle letters and words in the nearest article. You go meticulously, one by one, until I see that your marks are forming a sentence.

I went to jail.

"Because of me?" I ask softly, and you nod. More circling, taking longer this time.

I told them it was you. No one believed me.

"After everything you told me, I can see why. There was so much evidence."

"Yep."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Stop. You helped me. You got me out."

"I got you in, and I got you out?"

You hesitate before turning back to the paper.

You killed the judge in my trial. It was clear I couldn't have done it. They realized I had been framed.

"I assume I did that on purpose?"

"Everything you do has a purpose. A meticulous, brilliant purpose." You stare ahead at the back of the seat, pondering something greater than I can understand at the moment. "You wanted to help me."

"And then what happened?"

You shake your head. "I'm ashamed of it."

"I'm ashamed of everything you've told me. There's no need to hold back now."

The pen moves. *I decided to catch you in the act. I worked with the FBI to try and trick you. I betrayed you.*

I blink. "I'm not sure what you mean."

I acted like your friend. Like I was falling for you. But I was really spying on you. Turning everything you said over to the police.

"You were having me and Jack— my boss, remember— over for dinner. That was supposed to be the night."

"Why then?"

"We would all be in the same place."

"You could do that anywhere. It seems silly to do it in that kind of setting."

You open your mouth to speak, seeming flustered, but think better of it.

He wanted you dead.

Understanding dawns on me. "I see."

He wanted me to help him kill you. But he didn't know that I made the same plan with you to kill him.

"You were a double agent of sorts?" I lean in, my eyes widening. "Working with us both?"

"Yeah. But I chose you."

"Why? What made you turn to me?"

I loved you. I wanted to run away with you. You anxiously tap the pen against the paper as you think. *I had to get you out of there, because I didn't want you to get hurt.*

I grab onto your hand, kissing your knuckles. You swallow, and I watch your throat bob. Your lower lip quivers.

"I love you," I whisper to you. "I know that I'm not the same, but I can tell that I love you. It's a core part of myself now."

You nod. "Me, too."

"What happened after that?"

"I called you. The day that things were supposed to go down, I called you. All I had to say was 'they know,' and you figured it all out from there."

"Those words alone conveyed to me that you'd been working with...Jack?" His name lodges in the back of my mind for a moment, struggling to emerge.

You begin to write again, forgoing the code and just writing in the margins. It takes a long time, as you ponder what and what not to tell me. *You prepared everything. Jack was there first, and you attacked him. You ended up stabbing him in the side of the head and trapping him inside of your pantry. Then you waited for me.*

"Why? Because—"

"Remember what you said to me? In the Starbucks?" Your hand travels down to your abdomen once more, touching your shirt lightly. "What happened to me?"

"I st— I...I hurt you." A shudder travels through me. "God, I stayed just for that?"

"You couldn't decide," you say. "You didn't know what you wanted. You chose the option that would keep you safe."

"How would that keep me safe?"

"You wouldn't have someone to mercilessly see you anymore. You could hide from yourself again."

"You saw me?"

"I saw who you were, and I embraced it. No one else had ever done that before. And you did the same thing to me." A small smile travels up your lips. "It felt good. But it was also the scariest thing in the world, being seen like that. I couldn't handle it, and neither could you."

"So I chose to hurt you instead." I begin to reach for the place where your hand was resting, but then I remember my manners. "May I?"

You nod, and I rest my hand on top of your torso. It's firm, warm, and you guide my fingers down below your navel. I can feel the faint imprint of scar tissue, thick and raised.

"Wow." I pull my hand away, averting my eyes. "What was wrong with me? Not a single thing you've said about me has been good. As an outsider now, I absolutely hate myself." I shake my head. "I've been deplorable."

"That's the problem, though. You're an outsider." Your brow softens in sympathy. "You don't know yourself well enough to see the truth."

"What truth am I supposed to see?"

You think about what you want to say. "The inside of your mind is this...this beautiful palace. Massive and awe-inspiring. You've let me in many, many times— and that's a rare gift in itself. Every time I've gotten to see the inside, I'm reduced to nothing." You tap your foot. "It's like witnessing a miracle."

"Doesn't that seem a little dramatic?"

"Not if you know the truth. Not if you've actually seen it." You blink rapidly, seemingly holding back tears. "I think that you've accidentally fallen into the basement. We just need to get you back up into the light, and then you'll be the man you used to be."

"I'm not making much progress."

"It hasn't been long. And you've remembered little things. That's promising."

"What happened after this?" I touch your scar, wanting to know the rest of the answers.

You flip the page of the newspaper and begin to write once more. *You ran away without me. You ran to Italy.*

I lean as close to you as I can, my forehead resting against your temple. "Did anyone die that night?" I whisper. The question causes your expression to shift imperceptibly, but you quickly jot down a no.

"And now everyone knew who I really was?"

Yes. You ran to escape capture. You ran with a colleague of yours, someone who knew of all of your crimes. I don't know if you forced her, or if she ran on her own to escape being an accomplice.

"Is she alive?"

She claims you forced her and brainwashed her. I think it's bullshit.

"And what did you do?"

I went to find you.

I reach up to stroke your short hair. There is something so subtle in our movements, in our contact, that reassures me that we are joined together. We share a soul, you and I. I can tell that you love me dearly, and I wish I could find the memories to love you back as strongly.
"After what I did?"

I forgave you. Living with you was more desirable than living without you. I had never known myself as well as I did when we were together.

"What did you find?"

You gesture to your forehead, where another scar sweeps across your scalp. "You."

"Good lord." I shake my head. "I didn't stop, did I?"

"We never stopped. It was constant." You smile softly in disbelief. "The only reason you did this was because I tried to..." You cut a hand across your neck.

"And then what?"

You pause. "I think...I think I've given you a lot of information. I'm gonna let you process what I've given you first, and then we'll finish. Okay?"

As frustrating as it is, you're probably right. I lean my head back against the seat and close my eyes, pondering all of the things that we've been through. So many attempts to harm each other. I imagine myself thrusting a knife forward into your gut, slowly dragging the blade across your skin, and

and there is a knife in my hands. I am clutching you to my chest, but as you let out a cry of fear I realize that it's not you. It's a girl. A very young woman. She struggles under my grasp, yet I show her no mercy. The blade slices deep into her neck, and she gasps for air as blood bubbles in her trachea. I lower her to the ground, seeing terror in her big blue eyes, and lay her down right next to

you. You're sobbing, leaning over this girl like she means the world to you, trying in vain to stop the bleeding. You clutch your stomach, and there's blood coming from there too. I watch both of you, feeling nothing, and

and I wake up. Someone is making an announcement, voice booming across the train that we are reaching the border and we need to prepare our passports. I glance out the window, and it is pitch black outside. There is a crick in my neck.

"Nice nap?" You smirk at me, but all I can see is your twisted expression, the tears, the pain.

I rifle silently through our backpack for the passports. You notice my sudden change in mood, and your face falls.

"You okay?"

"I'm okay. I just want to get through the border." I stare at the seat in front of me. "And then you need to tell me about the girl."

Abigail

"The girl?" You blink, feigning innocence, but I noticed the way your expression fell when I said the words. It was a split second, but it was there. I may not remember things, but I'm not clueless.

"The girl I hurt." I tap my foot, stiffening when the voice of the conductor begins to ring through the train car. Everyone around us starts to stand, gathering their passports in order to get across the border. I rustle around my bag for my own— no, no, it's not mine. It's someone else's, someone that the old me slaughtered with no mercy. The thought makes me shiver. "You know exactly who I'm talking about."

I stand, leaving no room for protest. You wordlessly follow me into the line, clutching your own fake passport tightly. We move slowly, the line shifting little by little towards the front of the train. The conductor repeats his rules, stating that we can leave our bags behind as we are not transferring trains. We'll hop right back on once we make it past border patrol.

I cram to memorize my information once more as we wait in line, expecting someone to grill me. Even if we're in another country, my name is still well-known; I'm probably one of the most well-known killers across the world at this point. For someone so dangerous that I would even hurt a young girl, or someone that claims I loved him...it scares me that those things could be festering inside of me.

I tune into everyone else's conversations to avoid talking to you. Surprisingly enough, no one is staring at us; no one is whispering my real name and tugging on the sleeve of the nearest policeman. People glance over me, like I'm just anyone else.

They don't know what these hands have done.

A man behind a counter asks me for my passport, and I give it to him. He examines the picture, then me, looking back and forth a few times. I immediately begin to sweat— *he knows, he knows*— but I try my best to keep my composure.

"Name and date of birth?" He asks.

"Joseph Curran. August 17, 1970." It passes my lips easily, a stark contrast to how I actually feel inside. Still, he hesitates.

"May I search your bag?"

"Oh, it— it's still on the train. They told us we could leave it." I swallow.

"You, sir." He points towards you, and you step closer. "Are you with him?"

"No, sir," you reply smoothly, shaking your head.

"Did they search your bags at the train station?"

"Yes, sir, they did." It's a complete lie, but I nearly believe you with how convincing it sounds. The agent nods, satisfied, and hands me my passport back with a nod.

"You need to update your passport photo," he tells me. "It almost doesn't look like you."

"Right, yes. I've been meaning to. Rhinoplasty." I gesture vaguely to my face, and the agent nods with a slightly more understanding expression. He ushers me along, and for appearances I walk away without waiting for you. After all of that, it makes sense to keep up your lie. That, and being around you gives me mixed feelings.

I want to hate you. You've lied to my face so many times, and I can't even tell if what I know now is the truth. This could be another elaborate ploy. No matter what, it doesn't look good for you, as you've kept another massive part of my story from me. Something tells me that we wouldn't be who we are now without that girl, the way your hunched over her, weeping...I can't stand being kept in the dark.

But every time I look at you, there's a primal love. It's instinctual, something that has always been there. I can't get rid of it. It's one of the main reasons I want to get my memory back: I want to love you again. Fiercely. Truly.

My heart is still beating from the exchange with the guard when I collapse into my seat on the train. I slip my passport back into my bag and take a large gulp of lukewarm bottled water. The taste of plastic lingers in my mouth.

You sit back down next to me.

"I was scared to tell you about her," you say quietly. "I didn't want to."

"Why?"

"You...you took her from me. And I wanted another chance to keep her memory to myself." You sigh. "I wanted some alone time with her, without you there to take her from me again. If you never remembered, then...then she would be mine. I could honor her the way I wanted to."

"How did I take her from you?"

"Abigail. Her name was Abigail." You say it with reverence.

"Abigail." It feels natural. "How did I take Abigail from you?"

"You killed her," you say in a soft whisper. "But you took her from me long before that."

You tell the story in the simplest terms that you can, lest someone hears, but your voice is so soft that even I have to strain to hear. No one is going to be listening in, especially not with

the noise of the train. I let you continue, though. It feels like a story that should be told quietly.

I helped Abigail, but I didn't. I thought I was helping her. I kept her alone in my house, letting the world think she was dead. I stole her blood and painted a crime scene with it. I stole her ear and shoved it down your throat. I kept her for you, and when you betrayed me I mercilessly took that reward away.

You tell me about the baby. About the man with the pigs, about his sister, and about how you nearly became a father. I took that child away, too. You tell me about how you did become a father, for a short amount of time— but it was never enough. You were a husband to someone who cared, and yet it was never enough. I made sure of that. I took everything from you.

We are toxic. I am toxic.

"I would be better off dead," I say. It's only after it's out that I realize I interrupted you— you were in the middle of a sentence. I was too focused on my own self hatred to notice. "This world would be better without me in it. You would be better."

"The world would maybe be more populated without you in it," you reply, "but it would definitely be uglier. You find beauty in such small things, in sophistications that most people don't even think of. You add gold to a dull world." You lean closer. "And that second part is wrong. I would be exponentially worse without you."

"Even after all I did?"

"I wouldn't be myself. I'd be suffering, hidden, harboring disgusting feelings for so long that it would eventually make me off myself." You close your eyes. "I wouldn't be free. I'd be dead."

"It's a miracle that you're alive now, it seems."

"Well, that's another thing you made sure of." You sigh. "You could never bring yourself to kill me. Never. You tried and tried, but you wouldn't let it happen. You knew better."

"I knew you were the only person I could ever have. And so I stole every chance you had to get away."

"We are the only people made for each other. We can't have anyone else because they don't understand. They'll never understand."

"When you..." I hesitate, deciding whether to tell you this. "When you said her name— Abigail— it made me feel something. An instinctual sensation that I can't describe."

"Paternity, maybe?"

"I think I loved her." I shake my head. "I know I loved her."

"I don't know if you did. You used her."

"I tried." My voice cracks, and I clear my throat. "I really did."

"How would you know? You can't remember," you snap at me, brow furrowing in annoyance.

"I just...I need to believe that there was at least some good part of me. That I was not the epitome of evil."

"You're not. I can't describe it to you. It'll never be easy for you to understand as an outsider." You instinctively reach to move your hair back, forgetting about the buzz cut. You run your fingertips over the scar on your forehead instead. "I can't tell you what happened to Abigail in the months you kept her, because I don't know. Only you know that— and even then, you don't know anymore. So you can believe whatever you want to believe, and it'll be true."

I imagine the girl from my earlier vision, painting her features as best I can from the fleeting memory. We're in a bedroom, and the window outside shows that it's well past sunset. She's laying under the covers, and I stand in the doorway, watching.

"Are you alright?" I ask her. She raises her head off the pillow and nods, her face unreadable. I enter the room.

"I'm fine," she says weakly. "Tired."

There is something massive that she is holding back. Cautiously, I lower myself onto the mattress and reach for her, holding her close in my arms. She leans in, shuddering with tears.

"It's going to be okay," I tell her. "I'm right here."

It's then that I realize that I love her.

I blink, and the scene is gone. It disappears as quickly as she did.

"Then I was good to her," I finally say to you. "I was her safety, before I was her greatest danger."

You nod, satisfied, and lean your head back against the seat. "You good if I try to rest?" You ask, and I agree. It would be good for you anyway, after such a long few days.

I watch you settle in, admiring the way you look when you abandon all appearances. I'm about to do the same when I feel the overwhelming stress of someone else's eyes on me, which sends a chill through my body. I examine the people around us, and no one seems to be paying close attention. I then, however, catch sight of a woman wearing all black whose head is turned towards us. She quickly averts her gaze once she sees me notice her.

The small glimpse I got of her expression was disheartening— she looked terrified.

Freddie

I casually lean my head on your shoulder, trying to hide the way I'm whispering in your ear. "Keep your eyes closed," I say first, "but the woman across the aisle from us? Diagonal to us, one two up. She was just looking at us like she'd seen a ghost."

You inhale sharply, but you do as I say. In lieu of speaking, you trace a question mark into my thigh with the tip of your finger. The woman is no longer looking, but we both know that it's better to be safe.

"Hard to tell," I answer through clenched teeth. "Her hair is all under a big hat. Thin, wearing black. Just a small bag around her shoulder."

"Shit," you hiss. "You've got to be fucking kidding me."

"We don't know for sure—"

"Oh, I know." You've opened your eyes now, glaring at the seat ahead. "Trust me. I know exactly who that is."

I've gotten a vague grasp of the situation by the time the train finally comes to the station in Quebec, but not nearly enough to do any of the talking. You push through the crowd of people leaving the train car, reminding me for the fifth time to keep my mouth shut.

"She can't know that your memory's gone," you've said many times now. "She'll take extreme advantage of that. She'll tell everyone."

We're some of the only people who haven't put larger bags in the train car, so we're able to get out sooner than the majority. You see the woman quickly darting away, clutching her shoulder bag tightly, and you break into a run.

When your hand clamps down on her shoulder, she yelps and whirls around. It's enough of a ruckus to attract a few stares, and I find myself wincing when she opens her mouth to scream louder. Something that you say or do stops her, though, and the two of you begin to walk away as I catch up. You steer us towards the smoking patio outside, which is thankfully empty, and you finally let go of her.

"Freddie Lounds." Your voice drips with poison. "What a pleasant surprise."

"Swear to God, I didn't mean to. Swear to God." She pulls off her hat, revealing her thick red curls. "I'm just the unluckiest bitch on this planet."

You didn't tell me much about Freddie. I know that she's a reporter, and I know that she has a talent of getting into other people's business. She's skilled at both slander and libel, and she's no stranger to writing hit pieces on the two of us— both before and after we ran away together.

I can't decipher how she found us, and you share the same thought. "How in the hell did you end up on the same train as us? Is Jack here?" You look around us, searching for a secret agent. "He did a really shitty job of hiding you."

"No, no, he's not here." She shakes her head. She doesn't seem that intimidated by us, and it makes me wonder how long she's known the truth. "I couldn't wait for witness protection. I wanted to get out of the country as quickly as I could."

"And you just chose Quebec?"

"I have family here. I didn't plan on staying for long, just to get my bearings."

"And you ended up on the same train as us?"

"Not that many trains to Quebec trying to get there at the same time." She has the bravery to roll her eyes. "For the record, I wasn't on your train the entire time. I had to switch cars after the border stop." For the first time, she really examines me. "You're quiet," she says.

For a moment, I stand frozen. "...I have a very distinct manner of speech," I finally reply, lowering my voice to appear nervous. "I'm trying to speak as little as possible."

"Okay, whatever." She waves a dismissive hand. "Just— please, Will. I'm not gonna say anything. I don't want anyone to know where I am either." Her eyes betray how terrified she really is. "I didn't see you; you didn't see me. I'll leave you alone for good."

"You're not gonna call Jack? The FBI? You've got a real juicy story on your hands, Freddie."

"I'd rather have my life."

You study her, hesitant to accept her offer. I, on the other hand, am busting at the seams at the chance to slip away. I take a step closer.

"Freddie," I say, low and intense, "I got out of jail. I can do it again. If we are captured, and I have even the slightest suspicion that you had something to do with it, my first move upon escaping will be to find you. Do you understand?"

She stands her ground quite nicely, nodding along with an unreadable expression. "I have no reason to draw that much attention to myself, anyway. Just...please, Hannibal. Will." She stares at both of us intently. "If you're going to kill me anyway, just tell me now. Don't give me false hope. *Please*."

"You understand my reservations," you say. I sense that you're getting some kind of pleasure from tormenting her. "You have literally every motivation to turn us in."

"I don't even know where you're going," she groans. "You two have been through more than I've ever seen anyone go through, and you're still together. You're still free."

"Indeed," I mutter to myself.

"At this point, this is destiny. Everyone that's ever come between you meets a terrible demise." I catch a haunted glint in her eye. I can tell she's seen many things and been through just as much, and I can't help but admire her. "I'm not going to toy with that."

You glower down at her. "...No more articles," you tell her.

"No more articles."

"It's not very smart to piss off a guy who kills for a living. I don't just think about it anymore, Lounds."

"Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions." The corner of her mouth turns up. "You'll never see me again."

"I hope that's the case." You finally get out of her space, and her shoulders relax slightly. "Now go. *Bonne chance avec ta famille*."

"Bonne chance avec votre mari meurtrier." She backs away towards the door, refusing to look away from us, and slips back into the train station. Soon enough, she's disappeared into the crowd. There's no catching her now.

"You really enjoyed that, didn't you?"

"She spent years slandering both of us. I deserve a little torment."

I chuckle. " 'Murder husband.' "

"Oh, don't you start with that, too." You spin, scowling playfully. "Glad to know your knowledge of French stayed with you, I guess."

"It's as natural as remembering how to walk."

"Okay, mister posh." You scoff. "Let's get out of here."

"Perfect time for you to tell me all about her."

Rest

Quebec, Canada

$632.83

$113.36 (Canadian dollars)

You chug half of the bottled water that we just bought from the market, sighing in relief. "I've been so thirsty. Too much talking."

"Well, you're not finished yet." I take a smaller sip of my own, feeling the cool water travel down my dry throat. It feels great. "We need to figure out where to go from here."

"I want to be able to make enough money to fly to Europe. But we have nowhere near enough." You grimace. "We need to find some way to make some cash without anyone finding out who we are. Something underground."

"That would be a lot easier if we were still in America. Things aren't as sketchy here." I gesture to the pristine streets, not marred at all by the presence of litter or trampled chewing gum. "I think we mainly need to find a place to sleep. Money...well," I struggle to find a euphemism, "we've done a lot of hard work in our lifetimes." I stick my hand in my pocket. "What's a little more?"

You quickly get the hint, nodding. "It's the quickest way. We just have to figure out how to do it."

"Maybe I've got some kind of muscle memory. Maybe it'll come back to me."

"No way. You were too rich for that." You roll your eyes. "You're right. We need a motel."

We scan our surroundings, taking in all the people on the streets speaking French to each other, into their phones, reading French maps. I'm fishing around for something in my brain, trying to conjure my knowledge of French, when you turn to the nearest person and begin to speak.

"*Excusez-moi, où se trouve le motel le plus proche, s'il vous plaît*?" You ask, the words spilling out fluently, and you listen intently as the stranger responds.

"*Merci. Merci beaucoup.*" You smile and give a friendly departing wave, and you set off once more as if it all never happened. "Alright. Motel Lévis. Couple blocks up."

"What the hell was that?"

"It's called French. It's a language that's dated all the way back to the—"

"Since when did you speak French?"

"For all you know, I've always spoken French. Maybe you just can't remember."

I stare at you in disbelief, and your sarcastic resolve finally collapses as you smirk. "I'm joking. I don't think I ever told you even before all of this." You shrug. "I grew up in Louisiana. I spoke a lot of Creole, based in French, and then I just learned the base language."

"Wow. I wouldn't know that from looking at you."

"Southern boy," you quip with a fake twang. "Just try telling my father that my partner is a man."

"You don't have to worry about that anymore. His son is dead and gone. The men we were don't exist anymore."

"Not really. As long as we know each other, we'll never not be those people. There will always be someone there to remind us of our past lives."

"Are you alright with that?"

"If it means I get to be with you, I'm alright with anything."

We walk in a comfortable silence the rest of the way to the motel. Thankfully, there are rooms open, but you tell me that you could only pay for one night for now.

"It's eighty a night. I only converted, like, a hundred to Canadian. I'm hoping we'll have some kind of plan by the time this night is up— that way we're not spending any more than we have to."

"Got it."

The room we enter is extremely nice, the quality of a fancy hotel back in America. I marvel at the pearly white beds, the clean carpeting.

"Believe it or not, the guy on the street told me that this was one of the cheapest motels." You sink down onto one of the mattresses. "Oh, Canada."

"Do you think we could just stay here? Save ourselves the trouble of another step?"

"No," you reply instantly. "No. We're too close still. It would be safer to go overseas— somewhere we can place that large physical barrier between us and the FBI. News of us wouldn't travel somewhere in remote Europe."

"It's going to be a hassle to get enough money to fly that far."

"I know. And we need it fast." You slip out the wallet that you've been keeping in your jacket pocket, counting the money inside for the fifth time today. "Before we know it, we'll be down to half of what we started with."

An idea springs into my head. "Put the wallet away," I tell you. "It's only making you more nervous. It hasn't changed since the last time you checked."

Annoyed, you relent and slip it back into the inside jacket pocket, near your chest. I think for a second, and no specific memory comes to mind— I have to rely on instinct. If I fail, it's just you. I can practice all I want on you.

"Look at you. You're all ruffled." I walk towards you and fuss with the front lapels of the jacket, pretending to adjust them. Cautiously, I let my right hand work the wallet out from the pocket, holding it in place with my right little finger. I then quickly change hands, brushing your shoulder with my right and catching the wallet with my left. I then drape my arms around your shoulders, passing the wallet from left hand to right as I do so.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I want to remember things. I really do. I want to make this easier on both of us. I feel like I'm ruining everything."

"You're not ruining things. I just want us to be safe. We can work on your memory once we get to where we need to be. You've already saved us enough with the money you saved up. The passports. The disguises."

"Right, but I did that long ago. Before all of this." I bring my arms back down, making sure you're distracted by my voice and eyes as I toss the wallet back into my left hand behind my back. I slip it into my back pocket, triumphant. I can't contain the small smile that appears on my face. "But I think I just saved us even more."

"You have an idea?"

I take the wallet out of my pocket. You stare at it for a moment, recognizing it as yours, and then you frantically pat your inside jacket pocket. You check inside, seeing that it really is gone, and you stare at me in disbelief. "Hannibal, did you take that from me?"

"You really didn't notice?"

"You did that just now?" There's a twinge of anger behind your voice. "How the hell did you know how to do that?"

"I...I really don't know." I stare down at the wallet in my hand. "I thought I'd try it. See if I had some kind of muscle memory. I guess I do."

"Then that's it. That's what we've got to do." Your voice speeds up. "Do you think you could do more of that? Or other methods? I can help out, be the distraction."

"I can probably do the classic collision one. Where one of us bumps into a person and the other slips out the contents of the purse. What I just did was different, since you have to see my face. You have to let me touch you. Most people won't do that."

You nod, considering. "Be honest with me. What are your thoughts on mugging?"

I raise my eyebrows. "Oh. Wow. I don't know if that's a great idea. It's too risky."

"If we planned it out. Took precautions, scoped out the spots, wore all kinds of dark clothes and get masks. Do you think we could do it?"

"Based on what all you've told me these past few days, I think we can do anything."

You smile. "The sooner we can get started, the better. Let's think about this— we could get right in the middle of that downtown area, swipe as many purses or wallets as we can. Just stick to cash; that way we can pay at the airport and not be tracked through anyone's card."

You've started pacing now. "Come on, I think we should go get a few for things. Just get comfortable with the area and—"

"Will?" I find myself longingly gazing at the bed, my muscles suddenly twice as heavy from the stress of the past few days. You spin, concerned by the weakness of my voice, and I hope that you'll let me have this.

"Can we just rest for tonight? Please?" I gesture to the window. "The sun's about to set. We've been on our feet for so long—"

"Every hour we're not moving, the police are probably getting closer."

"Do you think they'll find us this quickly? At this motel, in this city? No one has seemed to realize who we are. If the police were on our trail, they'd be here already." I sit down, sighing. "I'm so tired, Will. Please?"

Your shoulders fall. "Hannibal...of course. God." You sit next to me, leaning your head on my shoulder. I feel your buzzed hair tickle the side of my neck. "I'm sorry."

"I understand. We're both stressed. This is a lot to go through." I put my arm around you. "I just need to sleep. We'd operate better with rest, anyway."

"You're right. It sounds great to get some sleep and get out of these clothes." You shrug off your jacket, laying on the opposite bed. I take that as my cue to start undressing as well, and soon we are both shirtless and wearing our boxers.

"We need to finally check on your wound."

I let you take me to the bathroom, where you tend to my side with a washcloth and wrap it with more gauze that you've brought in your backpack. The bullet hole is red, and it still throbs with pain; I probably need to get to a hospital, but I know that you'll immediately shut that idea down. It will have to heal on its own with proper care.

We don't speak. I let your hands caress my stomach, gently tending to me. You handle me with care, not like I'm fragile but like I'm divine, something worthy of gentle worship. I'm impermeable, but it is because of that fact that you are respectful.

Your touch tells me that I am a God to you. Realizing this is an arrow through the heart, and it makes me see you in a new light. It makes me see our relationship as something even more beautiful than I thought.

I hold you as we drift off to sleep. It's the least I can do for you.

Robbery

Quebec, Canada

$632.83

$33.56 (Canadian dollars)

The only bad thing about choosing to go to sleep is that when we wake the next morning, we are dreading the day ahead. I fantasize about staying in this bed all day, resting my weary body, having you share memories with me in the hopes of bringing something back— but that can never be. We have money to collect and a flight to buy.

"We're going to wait for the middle of the day, when the city will be the most crowded," you say as you slip on your clothes. "I think we should spend the morning getting some supplies, stuff to cover our faces. Ski masks, probably. It shouldn't be too suspicious, especially somewhere so cold. If anyone asks, we're traveling."

"We shouldn't waste money on new clothes. We should have enough dark clothes here to throw something together."

"I agree." You examine yourself in the mirror. "I never thought I'd say this, but I'm actually jealous of American gun laws right now. It would be so much easier to get a gun down there."

"We don't need a gun. Too messy, too loud. Too easy to trace." I shake my head, pulling on a sleeve of my jacket. "Do we have any sort of weapon? So we don't have to buy anything?"

"I might have a pocketknife. Hold on." You kneel down to look through your bag. "I know I had one on me the day that you broke out of the hospital. I knew I'd be traveling near you, and I didn't know what you were going to do."

"That's reassuring news about my character."

"Come on, do you really think either of us are worth redemption?" You quirk an eyebrow, pulling a folded switchblade from the front pocket of your backpack. "There we go."

"That should be enough. Especially if there's two of us to corner them."

"You used to work out. I don't know if there years in prison did much for your muscle mass."

"Something tells me that I worked out anyway. Knowing how this Hannibal guy sounds."

You laugh. "I wouldn't be surprised." You slip the blade into your pocket. "Ready to go skiing?"

_____

We take advantage of the complimentary breakfast at the motel. I eat light. Knowing what's in store for today makes my stomach churn with nerves.

We evade suspicion by purchasing the masks at separate times, entering different stores at completely different hours. It's better for us to avoid being seen together, given that our main claim to fame is our relationship.

We don't need them now, however; the sun is still shining high in the sky. It's approaching lunchtime, when everyone will be crowding the city streets, and I can already see huge crowds gathering around the beautiful buildings of Quebec City. I hear a healthy smattering of French, but there are also plenty of tourists— those are the people we want to target.

The two of us relate the plan to each other one more time, and then we set our sights on a middle-aged woman in sunglasses, carrying multiple shopping bags. I stride towards her, ready to turn on the charm.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" I say after I've taken my place next to her, both of us gazing up at the magnificent castle. "A marvel of human design."

She nods, giving a gummy smile and saying something about her hometown. I block her out, instead focusing on maintaining eye contact and drawing her attention through precisely placed movements. A tilt of the head here, a brush of the jacket there; the action draws the eye.

It's a perfect diversion for when you come crashing into her, your brow furrowed in anger. You start blathering in angry French, speaking so fast that it overwhelms even me. There's enough of a crowd that people turn to look, but they don't look hard enough. I catch the woman by her forearms, distracting her even more, and then I'm offering to go catch the man who did this to her. She's blushing, and I'm running off, and I'll never see her again.

We do this a few different ways. There are times where you are the distraction, sidling up to someone on a bench and advertising your petition to a confused patron as I quickly rustle through the bag. Other times I am the one offering to take a family photo, and right behind the smiling group you're digging through purses.

Some methods work. Some of them don't. By the end of the day, we've traversed the city and scavenged about eight wallets, but total we only have about two hundred and fifty in cash. We return to the motel to wait for dark.

"It's something," you say, stuffing the bills into your own wallet. We've discarded the stolen wallets, leaving them near a tourist center for them to be put in the list and found. We only needed the cash.

"I don't think we can uphold this for many days until we get the money, though." I frown. "And we already have to pay for another night."

"That's why we went shopping this morning." You zip up your black jacket, grabbing the door and holding it open for me. "We've got more fun in store."

You insist on waiting for a late night hour, at least towards midnight, as there will be less people out to witness the event. You want to be the one making the demands, in case the victim speaks French. We don't plan on causing any harm; we just want to get the wallet and run without any trouble. If there's major resistance, we decide that it would be best to run than to risk getting hurt.

We travel with our masks in hand down to another section of the city a few blocks away. The night life here is more present, and we see that quite a few clubs are still lit up with activity. We scope out the area, finding an alley to slip into where there are no cameras, and from there we hide in the shadows with the masks over our faces. It's itchy and slightly too warm, but I know it's protecting me from a much worse fate.

You flip your pocketknife around in your hand, nervously running your thumb along the handle. I reach out and take your free hand in mine, squeezing it.

Most of the women we see are smart enough to be walking in groups. There's one woman by herself, but she has an umbrella, and we both share a silent glance that somehow communicates our thoughts on that. She's got her own weapon.

We quickly establish a system where, if one of us decides that a person isn't a match, we squeeze the other's hand twice. Both of us are on edge, waiting for the time when we can only do it once— our symbol for yes. After that one signal, we're throwing ourselves into danger.

I peek out from the corner and gaze down the street when it's my turn, and I notice a lone man walking slowly down the street. He's immersed in his phone, not paying much attention to his surroundings, and he is shorter than both of us. I don't see considerable muscle under his clothes. I switch with you so you can take a look, and after the longest few seconds of my life you squeeze once. Yes.

The man enters the vicinity, and we strike. We burst out of the alley and grab him by the arms, yanking him into the darkness and throwing him against the brick wall. I snatch his cell phone out of his hand and turn it off. The man makes no sound, completely overcome by shock, and you've got the blade to his neck.

"English?" You ask in a low hiss, and the man replies with something in French. You lean close, relaying our demands through clenched teeth, and the man fumbles through his

pockets. He pulls out a billfold, appearing like he's going to give us the money, and I nearly breathe a sigh of relief.

But then he throws it all the way across the alley and onto the sidewalk by the street. Both of us turn our heads, and he utilizes the distraction to lunge at us, throwing punches at you as he tries to get back out into the light. He opens his mouth to scream, and I frantically clamp my hand over his mouth to keep the sound from escaping. His teeth sink into my flesh, searing me with pain, and I knee him in the groin and kick him in the chest. He flops backwards onto the sidewalk.

I wish I could say that a million thoughts were rushing through my head, that I ran through the consequences and potential outcomes before I made the move that I did. I wish that I could say I was that careful, that considerate.

That's not what happened. Instead, with a blank mind and a slow-beating heart, I kneel down on top of the man's gut and reach for his head. I twist it with all of my might, and with a snap that echoes through the alley our target drops dead.

Memory

Both of us are silent for a moment, staring at the product of my monstrous act. I can't bring myself to care, can't bring myself to realize how much of a savage I am. I'm only relieved. It's a weight off my shoulders. It's the release of something that had been pent up for a long, long time.

"Get the wallet," I tell you. You do, and I get back up on my feet. I am nothing. I am simultaneously numb and exhilarated. "How much? Please tell me this was worth it, Will."

I hear the snap of the button as the wallet pops open. You count, and it feels like it takes years. "A hundred bucks."

It should be frustrating, to go through all of that risk and effort and virtually nothing, but I'm not fazed. It's better than no money. It's a good chunk of what we need. Every little bit counts.

I look down. The man is staring vacantly at the night sky. His neck is bent at an ugly, unnatural angle, and yet I am calmer than I've ever been. It's like this is all I needed. This was the key.

"Let's go." You're tugging at my arm, and for the first time I hear fear in your voice. "We need to go, Hannibal."

I follow along, and the two of us dart across the street with our heads down. The crowds are still mainly congregated around the bars and clubs, and no one seems to be paying much attention to us. We grip each other's hands and run as fast as we can, ignoring how suspicious it may look. We've done something much worse already— or I have. I just set us on a terrible trajectory.

The night is chilly, and even with the mask the wind bites my cheeks as we run. The world is punishing me. My already injured torso throbs, overworked. I'm alive.

Just before we reach the motel, we take off our masks and the top layer of clothes. Neither of us are wearing black under the jackets, so our outfits don't seem too out of place now. We wordlessly glance at each other, ready to carry through with the plan we'd concocted before.

We enter the motel laughing over some fake scenario, out of breath for a much more innocent reason than running from a murder scene. You smile over at the person at the desk, and they return it. We always know when to turn on the charm.

Your hands shake as you slide in the key to our room. When the door opens, the room is pitch black, and you rush to turn on a light. The dark is too uncomfortable for either of us. I swing the "do not disturb" sign onto the doorknob and lock the door behind us, breathing unsteadily.

We begin to change without speaking. We throw the black clothes into a heap on the floor, ready to burn them if need be. As I slip off my shirt, my side pinches with pain, and I look down to see that I'm bleeding through my gauze. Luckily, it looks like it just started. Seeing it hits me with a sense of relief that I did things the way I did— I left no blood behind. That would have been a massive problem.

"Oh," you say when you see it. "Here, we need to fix that up. Come on."

I sit on the lid of the toilet, and you kneel in front of me with the first aid kit. We've done this before, but I feel like you are even more gentle this time. You know that I am extra wound up right now, and you're trying to offset it; either that, or you have even more respect for me now that I've taken a life.

"It's looking a little bit better," you murmur. "It just bleeds a lot when you put in a lot of effort. Maybe we need to calm down the next few days."

"I think we need to lay low after this," I agree. "We can't put any more eyes on us."

"How did it feel?" You wrap the gauze around me, and your hand brushes my warm skin. "I mean, this might as well be your first time killing."

I lean my head back. "Like Prometheus," I say. It's the first thing that comes to mind. "Every day, he woke on the side of a mountain, dreading the return of the wretched bird that would inevitably devour his liver. The next morning, he'd wake up and do it all over again." My eyes close. "I am Prometheus at dawn. I have relief from the pain, but I dread what's coming next."

You don't answer. You consider my words for a long time, and then you wordlessly stand up and leave the bathroom, setting the gauze down on the counter. I remain seated, unsure what to do.

When I finally emerge from the bathroom, you're already in bed with the light turned off. I fumble my way through the darkness and under the covers with you, and you don't move to embrace me. We simply lay across from each other. I can't tell if you're awake and doing this to spite me or if you're just asleep.

It's then that it hits me. Everything that I've done, what I'm doing to you, what I've always been doing to you, the chain of events that I've just set off all for a measly few dollars, the actions that made the situation this way in the first place— it all comes crashing down on me. I am heavy. I have been holding the world on my shoulders; I have been carrying all of the knowledge in the universe inside of my mind, my palace, and I am tired. I am so, so tired.

I thought everything was going to be okay.

"Hannibal," you utter softly to me. I can make out the vague outline of your face in the dark. "I think you and I both know what's going on here."

You reach out to touch my face. Your palm cradles my cheek, and it is the most gentle anyone has been to me in years. It's everything I needed. It's devastating. "It took me some time, but I get it now. You've given me too many signs."

"I don't know what you mean."

"This is your chance, Hannibal," you say. "If you tell me the truth now, I won't be mad. Promise."

I pause. "Do you love me, Will?"

"Yes. Yes, of course I love you. We wouldn't be here if I didn't."

That is what breaks me. "Don't lie to me." Tears brim in my eyes. I cannot be strong anymore. "Please don't say that when you don't mean it."

"What makes you think I don't mean it?"

"You know what you did," I snap, forgoing all pretenses. There is no point anymore.

You reach for me, wiping a tear from my cheek that I didn't know was there. "Yes," you say, "I do know. And if you do, as well...then there's an inconsistency in your story. And I want the truth."

"You're going to require me to say it?"

"Yes. Please."

I blink. There is no going back after this. I will have to live with what I've done, and we will have to live with the daunting challenge of each other.

I never lost my memory," I manage to say. "I've remembered everything this whole time."

Truth

From the minute I woke up in the house on top of the cliff, in the stiff bed with the gauze wrapped around my fresh wound, I remembered everything. I knew who I was, who you were, what we'd done. I remembered the fall, my head colliding with something solid, and then the faint mirage of being carried up the hill.

I watched you as you slept next to me, and I felt a discomfort simmering inside of me. I thought you loved me. You sank into my arms and surrendered to the ecstasy of your Becoming, but none of it was real. We had done nothing but deceive each other over the course of our relationship, but this was crossing the line. This was sharp teeth in my vulnerable throat. It was, in my mind, after everything we had already been through, unforgivable.

As a doctor, I know amnesia doesn't act anything like how it does in media. There is no scientific chance that I could forget nearly every aspect of my life, not in this particular way. It's common medical knowledge that popular depictions of amnesia are shams— but you're not a doctor. And I am an actor.

So I decided to do some more faking.

"Thank you." You wrap your arms around me, pulling me close to your chest. I want to sink into the comfort of your embrace, but I know that it's all false. It's all a ruse. This situation started because of what you did to me.

"Please drop the act, Will. You do not love me. You never did." I inch myself away from you. "You said that we wouldn't be here if you didn't love me. But we're here because you don't love me. Because you pushed me off of a cliff to get rid of me."

"Hannibal—"

"If you'd kept us on the ledge, I could have given us a brand new life. I could have flown us somewhere beautiful. We could have basked in the sun and danced in the rain. But you

showed me who you were. You don't deserve any of that."

"So that's why. You were punishing me for what I did," you reply, monotone.

"You couldn't live without me, but you couldn't live with me, either. So I found a way to give you both. I turned myself into a blank slate. I wanted to show you what your life would be like without me. Without even the memory of me existing in my own mind. A sledgehammer to the foundations of the palace."

"That's not what I wanted. I wanted you."

"Then why did you push me off a cliff?"

"I pushed us off a cliff. I didn't do it with the intention of hurting only you."

"Tell me the real intention, then."

"I...I wanted both of us to die. I wanted us to die together."

I let out a heavy breath. "And you didn't consider that perhaps I didn't want to die?"

"I knew that if it meant being with me, you would die a thousand times." You stare into my eyes, and I know that you're right. I hate that. "I thought about us at the bottom of the ocean. I thought about us being down there forever, holding each other, and it...it was the happiest thought I'd ever had. We would meld into each other. And at the top of that cliff, after killing Francis, I figured that we were already on top of the world. There was no way we could go higher than we already were. I was alright with dying then, because I had finally reached my true self. I achieved my Becoming." You're crying now, too, and you squeeze my hand. "I know it makes no sense, but it did at the time."

I cannot find the right words to respond. I am almost never left speechless, and being in this state is horribly uncomfortable for me. I fumble for some words to break the tension in my brain. "You must understand how it looked to me," I finally say, "when I woke up and remembered what you had done. To me, it felt like an act of violence. It was proof that you didn't want me." I close my eyes. "So I took myself away from you. I felt that you didn't deserve my full self anymore."

"I understand, but I also don't. I mean, I get why it looked that way. There's no proper way to explain myself. It looks bad on my part. But after what we went through on that cliff, after what I said...you thought I didn't love you, and that hurts. It hurts, Hannibal."

"There was really no other way to take it. And after the betrayals you've enacted before—"

"I know. I know I've hurt you before, and it was the biggest mistake of my life. Every morning I would wake up in my bed alone, or I would wake up with Molly, I would feel this horrible gnawing at the inside of my chest. This emptiness that I'd never fill again. And it was my fault."

"You knew that there was a chance of losing me again. And you would never get a third chance."

"If I found myself in a situation where I survived and you didn't, I would make sure things didn't stay that way. I would have no more reason to live. And that almost happened— but I carried you out of the fucking ocean, Hannibal," you hiss. Your tone is intense, but it never rises above a soft mumble. You know better than to let anyone hear. "Even if you didn't lose your memory, you fainted. You hit your head pretty damn hard, and I landed easily. If I really hated you, I would have let you drown. It would have been easy.

"But, Hannibal, I scooped your deadweight body into my arms and carried you out of the ocean. I gave you CPR, and you woke up for a second to throw up before immediately going under again. I carried you all the way up that cliff and into bed. I bandaged your side and tucked you in and cried, because I wasn't sure when or if you would wake up again." You take my hand, holding it close to your clenched teeth and squeezing it as reassurance that I am here. "I did all of it because I love you. And seeing you like that reminded me that you were human, and it made me love you even more."

"You saw me as inhuman?"

"I think there was a primal part of me that wasn't afraid of the plunge, because it expected you to spread your wings and fly." You kiss my hand. "You're flawless, Hannibal. You're beautiful. It took me so long to see it, but looking into your eyes that night gave me a clear view of the palace. You opened the door and let me in, and it was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen."

"And then I locked you out," I murmur.

"Yes. But I think you wanted me to find out. You're smart enough to know not to drop some of the clues you did. The random vivid memories, the way you understood Freddie's French, the pickpocketing, the murder. It was Prometheus that did it." The corner of your mouth turns up. "You couldn't resist the chance to allude to mythology."

"Maybe it was purposeful." I shrug. "If it was, I was not aware of it."

"It doesn't matter. I...I just need you to let me in again, Hannibal." You run your hand through my hair. "And I need you to show me more than just the main foyer. Show me the decrepit attic and the cracks in the floorboards that trap you in horrendous memories. You have to understand that I didn't mean it. Please." You take a deep breath, and it's shaking with sobs. "Please."

"Will." I nestle my head into the crook of your neck, wrapping my arms around you. Your words ring through my skull, and for the first time in our years-long relationship I let myself truly cry.

No one has ever wanted to witness those parts of me before. If they have, they've fled. And now here you are, knocking on the door, promising to love me anyway. It brings a wave of sorrow and joy.

"Do not lie to me," I say. "I swear, Will, you cannot lie to me. If this is all some elaborate ruse, some way to trick me again, then I need to know now."

I refrain from saying it, but my palace is the most fragile part of me. You can take away my material goods, strip me down to a bare white prison uniform and stick me in one single room for years straight— none of it troubles me much. But the one thing I treasure most is my dignity. The vast halls of my mind's palace. It's the true part of me that I keep hidden from everyone, out of some terrible fear of rejection.

It's why I was so upset when you pushed us. I thought you were rejecting me, just like the rest of the world already has.

"I'm not lying to you. I promise." You plant a soft kiss on my lips, cradling my face. "I promise. I see you. You're beautiful. I need you, Hannibal."

More tears are flowing, leaving me nearly unable to speak. "I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me, Will. I thought...it was the right thing to do."

"I understand." You gently rub my back. No one has ever done that before. "I forgive you. I love you."

"I love you, too."

"You do know that, right? You know that I'm not just saying it?" You look into my eyes. "I love you. I need you."

"Even after everything I've done?" Hearing my crimes repeated back to me has only made me feel worse. I cannot believe that I've committed so many sins against you, and yet you're still here. "I took everything from you."

"I would throw my entire world away if it meant you would see me. If you would love me, and treat me like you love me."

"I will. I'm so sorry. I will." I melt. You cradle me gently in your arms, kissing my face and neck, telling me over and over again that it's going to be alright.

"I wanted to show you Florence," I whisper. It's silly to be reminiscing on something so long ago, but it's a thorn that still pricks me to this day. "I wanted to hold your hand and walk you along the beautiful streets."

"I wanted Abigail there." You grip my hair. "But remember what you always say, about the teacup. There is only the world we're living in now. Not before, not after. Now."

We kiss. Your body presses up against mine, and we are hugging so tight that, if it weren't for the limitations of science, we would merge together.

"I have money," I murmur to you in between kisses. "I have a few accounts under different names. Faux cards. I can take care of things from here."

"If I hadn't caught you, would you have just never told me that?"

"I didn't plan on doing it for the rest of our lives. Only once I was satisfied that you understood." I close my eyes. "I think I'm satisfied."

"Wherever you go, I'll follow."

We get a few hours of sleep, only to wake up long before sunrise to the sound of police sirens.

Bus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Shit." You bolt out of the bed faster than I can even react, opening the blinds to look out at the flashing lights that penetrate into the room. You continue cursing to yourself, crouching down on the ground and shoving everything into your backpack.

"Hannibal, get up," you say. "We have to go. Now."

Calmly, I sit up, rubbing my eyes. "Everything's in my backpack. Check the front pocket; there should be a train schedule. I took one earlier." I get out of bed, examining our surroundings and looking for the best way to exit. I walk to the window and observe the officers exit their cars— there are only two cars, and both of them empty out. There are no officers waiting in their cars, which means they'll be unattended.

"Oh, Canada," I mutter to myself, already fumbling with the window locks. The cool night air seeps into the room, and the sky is still dark. I wonder how the police were able to find us. It must have been my murder that tipped them off. I will admit that I wasn't thinking at all— it's the second biggest regret I have about this entire thing. I think the first is rather obvious.

"Watch, Will," I say, beckoning you. "Outside, there's a railing. We'll have to drop from there." I point at the balcony that juts out from the window, surrounded by the black cage. "We're going to scale it."

"The cars are right there. And we're facing the street." You frown. "Also, we're fucking naked."

"If you're that worried about decency, then get the clothes out. But quick. The boxers can pass as shorts; that's fine. Just get the shirts."

You toss me a wad of black fabric, and I put it on without any care as to whether it's forwards or backwards, inside out or not. "Follow what I do," I say, "and be careful. Quiet."

I walk out onto the balcony and grip the top rail. I swing one leg over, straddling the rail, and then I follow with the other. Hanging onto the top rail, I slowly work my hands down the bars and slide downwards. Once I'm out of reach, I catch a glimpse of you doing the same.

I'm now at the bottom, hanging onto the very last inch of the railing. The ground still seems so far away, but I see no other option besides dropping straight down— so I do.

I land on the concrete, bending my knees to soften the blow. It's not too far of a drop, less than ten feet, and you seem confident in your ability to do it.

"Hey!" A sudden shrill voice crying out from nearby throws you off your balance right as you let go of the rail. You fall much less gracefully than I do, landing with a stumble and falling. You hiss in pain, and as you stand I see that your knee is scraped. You always get back up, though, and we both turn to the source of the noise. It's a woman, standing on the balcony of her own room, staring at us in bewilderment. She must have heard the sirens, and I'm willing to bet others have, too.

"We have to go." I grab your hand and we take off, darting into the dark street.

"Jesus Christ," I hear you mutter as we run. "We're still in our fucking underwear, it's three o'clock in the morning..."

"I think you've been through worse." I stop for a moment, gazing around at where we are, and I pull you across the street to a large pillar that contains a screen with a map. "There." I point to the closest station. "We need to get on a bus and get as far away as possible."

"And you've got the money for that?"

"I always have. I was just hiding it."

"Okay." We start running again once I've taken in the direction that we are supposed to be going. "And were you ever going to tell me about it?"

"Quite frankly, I didn't think a lot of things through." I avoid your gaze. "I let my emotions get the better of me. Do you have my fake glasses?"

"They're in the bag. And yeah. Things don't tend to go well when your emotions take over. That's why I stopped letting that happen."

I'm not in the position to get into a deep conversation right now, so I don't respond. You don't attempt to restart the discussion, either, and we are both focused on sprinting in the direction of the bus station.

We reach the bus stop in good time, and somewhere a clock chimes four in the morning. The stop is empty, lit only by a flickering lamp and the orange glow of a space heater, and we sit on the ground behind the bench to avoid detection from the street. According to the posted schedule, we won't see another bus for at least a few hours, closer to sunrise, but there's nothing else we can do. We'll have to wait.

"I'm thinking Halifax," I say, slightly out of breath. "From there it's easy to fly out of the continent."

"Long ride ahead. We'll need a lot of bus fare."

"We've got enough cash to make it through most of it. When it's safer, I'll use an ATM to get some money out of my stored accounts."

"How on earth did you get all of those?"

"I have my ways. It worked when I was in Italy, and even then I only used one. Even if the FBI found it, I know they didn't find the other four."

"Do you just have it under different names?"

"Identity theft is very easy and very common. You should learn to look out for that."

"I think I know better than to log onto personal shit on public internet."

"Then you're already ahead of most people. Once you have someone else's info, you can take it and run from there. Switch the credentials, and it's hard to get back."

"Is there anything you don't have a plan for?"

"This, I suppose." I gesture vaguely to the world around us. "I sprung into an elaborate act without thinking about it first. Before I knew it, we were in Canada, and I had no clue how much to tell you or if I could ever tell you." I shake my head. "I didn't want to reveal once again that I'd lied to you. I've already done enough. However, I accidentally dropped a hint here and there, and then I just kept it up. I knew you would figure it out on your own."

"Tell me why, again." Vulnerability creeps into your expression. "I know you already did, but I want to hear it again. Why?"

I hold your hand; it's cold against my palm, and I cup my hands around it to warm you. "When you pushed, it led me to wonder once more if everything you'd done was all an elaborate ruse. A plot to kill me, that you did not actually love me. From what I could see, you could not stand the sight of me, and yet you kept coming back. Life with me and life without me were equally unbearable.

"I gave you both worlds. I'm there, and yet I'm not. The parts of me that brought you back time and time again were erased. I wondered if you would still stay, or if you were only in it for the facade I'd created. If you only loved the surface of the palace and not the inside, then I figured the best option would be to lock you out."

"I was never only in it for the facade."

"I know that now. Not then. When you saw me unpackaged, intimately sharing an experience with you, you literally pushed me away."

"That's not what it was." You lean your head back, and I see that your eyes are sparkling with tears. "That's not at all what it was."

"Then I could ask you the same question: why?"

"I thought about us on the ocean floor." You stare straight ahead, lost in the memory. Your voice is light. "Being in each other's arms, gathering sediment. Slowly sinking to the bottom and being there for the rest of time. It was the loveliest thought."

I try to picture it in my mind. I imagine large flakes of salt adhering to our skin, eating away at the flesh until we are an entwined pile of bones. Sand dusts over our bodies and creates a beautiful, natural grave. No one can ever tear us apart again— not for imprisonment, not for an autopsy, not for separate burials.

"I see it," I tell you.

"See? And try to think of it with the mindset we were in that night. Only a few days ago, now, but it seems like a different universe. Think of how you felt...and then that image springs to your mind."

I close my eyes. Never again could I draw up even a fraction of the emotion that I felt that evening, so haunting and so wonderful. I looked upon you and I saw divinity. The light of Heaven was reflected in your dilated pupils, a sign of sexual arousal, as well as in the glint of your sharp canine teeth. My own teeth were drenched in the blood of another; I wished it was yours.

"...All I knew then was that I loved you," I reply, "and I would do absolutely anything for you."

"Would you have died for me?" You lean your head on my shoulder. "In the moment?"

"Without a doubt, but—"

"Then why did it upset you?"

"But not by your own hand," I finish. "I thought that we'd finally reached the conclusion of our story. No more trying to hurt each other, because we'd done enough. I thought the embrace signified that."

"I also thought it was the conclusion. But I guess I took it in the opposite direction. Decided to go out with a bang— or a splash, I guess."

"It's rare for you to be the one with the big, dramatic interpretation," I tease, nudging you.

"Well, you stole my thunder right after by pretending to be an amnesiac for days." You repeat the gesture right back to me, and I relish your touch. "Drama king."

We're smiling. I see God in the way the corners of your eyes crinkle, hear Him in your chuckle. I need your forgiveness more than I need His.

"Can you forgive me?" I ask, waiting with bated breath for the answer.

"Of course." You lay your hand on mine. "Can you forgive me? Really and truly?"

"Yes. I understand. I forgive you." I turn my head and kiss your temple. "I love you."

"I love you."

You kiss me, and I feel God in the cool rush of breath that comes out of your nose, tickling my upper lip. I will never be the same again.

I'm glad.

I don't remember falling asleep. The next thing I know, you are nudging me awake as the bus finally pulls up to the stop, and we set off.

Chapter End Notes

I know this fic has been very dialogue heavy and I hope that’s okay. Feel free to let me know what you think

Airport

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Canada, Nova Scotia

$2,632.83

$380.45 (Canadian dollars)

After about an hour of riding between stops and moving from station to station, we board the bus for the long haul. We've got about eighteen hours to drive; however, I'm more worried about eighteen hours in public, risking being seen. Any wrong person could be the death of us, so we agree to keep our hoods up and our disguises as thick as possible. When we talk, which is rare, we speak French. I keep my glasses on even when I fall asleep, head tilted down to hide my face.

There doesn't seem to be a point, though. Everyone on the bus is engaged in their own thoughts or activities, and there are hardly any riders anyway. The seats around us are nearly all empty, and the one man that I can see hasn't woken up in hours.

I honestly dread the moments that we have to stop for breaks. I prefer the monotony of the bus, and it's one of the only places I've felt safe. I know that we can't be caught there, and knowing that we're getting farther and farther from danger comforts me.

The one thing the stops are good for, though, is the ATMs. I extract a large amount of cash from one of the accounts I keep open, two thousand dollars, and store it away safely in our bags. Despite years of being locked away, the FBI never found some of my accounts; I'd kept them in the hands of other people for good reason. Chiyoh is in charge of some of them, since there is little to no suspicion under her name, and the rest are under various fraudulent identities that I didn't keep the cards for. The police shut down all of my accounts for which I had IDs — but I had planned for that exact scenario.

"You had all of this, and you didn't say anything," you say to me as we get back on the bus, a tinge of betrayal in your voice. I wait until we're seated again to speak.

"I've explained myself," I say. "At some point, if we were really suffering, I would have pulled some out behind your back and acted like I found it somewhere. I wouldn't have let us become completely destitute."

"You let us start mugging people."

"It was your idea. I was hesitant, and you insisted."

"Whatever. You totally knew that you could have refused," you hiss. "You just wanted to kill someone."

This doesn't faze me like you want it to. "Perhaps I did," I reply. "I'll let you have your turn next time."

You blink, shaking your head in annoyance as you turn to look out the window. In your reflection, though, I notice you licking your lips, a distant expression in your eyes.

It's a long and exhausting ride to Halifax, especially for my legs. We both grunt and groan as we disembark at the final station, muscles screaming for movement, and we immediately depart for the airport on foot. Since we've decided to walk, we have no time to linger.

"Germany," I tell you. "There's frequent flights from Halifax to Frankfurt. Expensive, but we have the money."

"Those accounts have to run out eventually."

"You underestimate my family. And my ability to launder money."

"You just admitted to being both an old money kid and a racketeer."

"Double threat. Triple, if you count my impeccable murder skills."

You laugh drily at this. "For real. Are you going to run out of money on those accounts?"

"It's not like we'll be retiring and laying around the house all day — unless you want to, and in that case I don't blame you. But it doesn't have to be that way, if you're worried. We can get jobs."

"Just tell me how much we've got."

I sigh. "Okay, but don't get a big head about this. We can't start using it all at once, or else it'll seem suspicious. We have to spend moderately, like Chiyoh's already doing."

"Chiyoh runs your accounts?!" I watch your eyebrows raise. "She's willing to do that?"

"She shot you for me. And I also think she's a little afraid of me."

"Maybe because you made her shoot me for you." You roll your eyes. "Now tell me."

I tell you the truth in a low voice, careful of who's around us. "It's millions. Probably close to a hundred million."

"Fuck you," you gasp, almost instinctively. "You're serious?"

"Old money. I had a wealthy father, and so did he, and so on."

"God. Fuck you," you repeat, more bitter this time. You furrow your brow and stare down at the sidewalk. "You were just born into that?"

I fail to completely mask my surprise. "...I'm sorry I've made you angry. That's not my intention."

"It's just hard to not feel cheated." You contemplate your next words. "I grew up on food stamps, and you're just born into hundreds of millions of dollars."

"Oh. I didn't know that about you."

"Because I knew you'd see me differently." You're still not looking at me. "You'd use it to try and deconstruct my brain or something. Draw conclusions about me."

Although I know you've just told me not to, I'm already drawing conclusions. I consider how you've been the one in charge of our money this entire time, how you were the one who first suggested pickpocketing, how you were always finding the cheapest routes to where we were going. I reach for your hand, disregarding the fact that we're supposed to be hidden.

"It must have hurt you," I say, "being completely out of money and trying to live off of a few thousand dollars, all while running from the FBI. It must have reminded you of the anxiety of your childhood."

"Yeah, see? You're doing it right now. Don't do that." Your expression tells me not to push it.

I push it. "Money was a very limited resource back then. Your life became comfortable, and now I threw you back into your past. Did that hurt? Were you afraid at any point?"

"Yeah, Hannibal. I spent the entire time being fucking terrified. I lost the money, sure, and that was a scary situation. I lost the support of everyone around me, and that was even worse. And then I thought I lost you." Your gaze is burning into me like acid. "That was the worst part. I'm willing to have no money or friends or job. But I'm not willing to let go of you — and I hate myself for that, but I also need you so badly that I have no other choice than to...to stay." You tilt your head towards the sky, blinking rapidly. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be.

And not long ago, I would have fought that to the death, but now I've embraced it. I need you. I want you. I love you." Your voice cracks.

"Hey." I stop walking. "Look at me. I know we're in a rush, but there's no reason to cry. You and I are going to be alright. I promise, I will use the money I have to put us somewhere comfortable. You don't have to worry about running out anymore. We are secure, and we are going to be alright."

"Are we?"

"Of course."

"But really, are we?" You turn your head away from me and continue walking, leaving me behind for a second before I can register it. As always, I return to you. "Can I really let go? Or will you keep tricking me again and again? I thought that night on the cliff was the end of it all, but apparently it wasn't. You kept playing games with me."

"I'm sorry, Will. You know that I'm so, so sorry."

"I know. But can we trust each other to not do it again? I feel like the desire, the need, to deceive and betray is embedded into our makeup forever now. For me, it's a more recent development."

"I don't think that's true. I think that we are always capable of change as humans. And I also believe that you have always been a talented and dedicated liar. It's only now that you've become aware of it."

"I lied to myself, you mean. About who I was."

"And I believe that is the worst person one can lie to: themselves. So let's not do that." Your gaze becomes slightly less hard as I speak. "Right now, when I tell you that I will not lie to

you again, I am telling myself as well. I refuse to break that promise to either of us. Can you do the same?"

You nod. "Yes. I can. If we're agreeing to trust each other."

"Of course. I trust you."

"And I trust you."

The airport is not too far now, and without even looking at each other we somehow come to an agreement that we should break into a run. We take off, excitement flowing through my veins as we are finally leaving this continent, finally disembarking towards something greater, far away from those who wish us dead.

Chapter End Notes

I’m gonna do one more chapter after this :) thank you for the support!

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A thunderstorm has rolled in, and the two of us are dashing through the dark streets, following what we desperately hope is the correct path towards where we're going to be staying. Some landmarks are vaguely familiar, but it's been years since I've visited this place. I should have come more often; I should have been checking up on the place to make sure it was open for me when I needed it. Now, I can only hope.

We've been traveling for hours, and I can tell that you're nearly ready to give up. You're panting, soaking wet, your face riddled with exhaustion. I want so badly to stop for the night and cover you with blankets, but we can't. Stopping is too risky now.

At the airport, we saw a disheartening news broadcast: they'd found the body we left in the alley. They'd found foreign DNA on it. It's going to be mine.

We decided that this flight would be the last time we were seen on public transport. We couldn't do this anymore. No financial trails on this account, either, so renting a car was out of the question. It wasn't worth the risk. We would have to walk the ten miles from the airport to the village, relying on maps that guided us through the road systems. Our map is so wet that it's nearly falling apart.

I look up; my heart momentarily stopping as I read the road signs in front of us. I can't read the language, but I know the name of our town, and I recognize that we're reaching the last few kilometers.

"We're close, Will. We're close. We'll get a ride in the town."

You just nod, shivering. I hate myself for putting you through this.

Before long, a bright light shines on our backs. We swivel, surprised to notice a car traveling on the desolate road. The brights are blinding, and they stay shining in our faces for much

longer as the vehicle slows down.

We exchange a glance, nodding. We're both serial killers — if anyone wants to try anything, they wouldn't last long. I stick out my thumb and wave with my other hand.

The driver's side window rolls down, and a man about our age is staring at us with a wary gaze. He says something in another language, and I can only place my palms together in a begging gesture. I roll up my sleeve, showing him the address that we're trying to reach, and you pull out some money from your backpack. He thinks for a moment before finally unlocking the car doors. We scramble into the backseat before he can change his mind.

Inside, we both sag in relief. "Oh, my God," you whisper to yourself, burying your face in your hands. I want to collide with you, to show you how much I love you, but I'm too scared to. I can't have our only ride thinking that we're some kind of degenerate sinners.

The drive is much shorter than the walk would have been, at only about fifteen minutes. I recognize the neighborhood once we're in it, and I feel so much relief that I want to burst into tears.

You pay the man, and we both nod and make that same gesture profusely. He lets us go without trouble, and I retrieve the key from where I've hidden it so we can run inside.

When the front door is closed behind us, leaving us in a pitch black house that's finally quiet and safe from the rain, you fall to the floor and begin to cry.

"Oh, my love." I crouch, wrapping my arms around you to keep you warm. "It's alright. We made it. We made it. It's going to be okay."

“We made it,” you gasp. “We made it.”

”We *made* it.”

———————————-

Months later

Motovun, Croatia

A very comfortable amount of money

The morning sun is beautiful, so I'm taking advantage of it. I sit on the porch, nursing a cup of coffee and skimming over a news article on my tablet. Our faces are on the front page of TattleCrime, and nearly every mainstream news site is warning the public to watch for us. Luckily for us, these stories don't reach as far as Croatia, and we're well enough disguised to fool the rest of the world around us.

I hear the front door of our small cottage creak open, and three large dogs patter down the porch steps to go do their business. You follow after them, closing the door behind you and taking a spot beside me on the top stair. You roll your eyes as you read over my shoulder.

"God, do they have to keep using this picture of me?" You gesture to the screen, where your scowling face is plastered right next to mine. They've used our mugshots from long ago, now very outdated. "I look disgusting."

"Oh, you get a pass," I reply. "You had a brain disease."

"I look like such a baby, too. That was only, like, five years ago now, but I look twenty years younger."

"Sorry, love. I've aged you."

"Oh, I knew that already." You smirk at me. "But I've aged you, too." You reached up to run your fingers through my hair, which has gotten slightly longer. "You'll be a silver fox soon. You're, what, seventy-six?"

I nudge you, scoffing. "*Kopūstgalvi*. I'll be fifty this year."

"Alright, old man."

"You're forty-three!"

"Uh-huh. Much younger than fifty." You lean your head on my shoulder, moving closer. "But still plenty of life left."

"Yes. Plenty." I smile softly. Birds are singing around us. "We have so much time left to enjoy ourselves."

"It's been nice. I'm just so glad to relax." You sigh contentedly. "We made it, Hannibal."

"We made it. Just barely."

"We're alright. We almost got caught a few times, but we're alright. Remember, it's a miracle that we're alive at all."

"It was fate. I'm so glad that fate made the choice she did."

"It was about time. I think we were destined for this since day one." You kiss my cheek. "It all feels just right."

"It sure does." I cup your face, tilting your head towards mine, and together we melt.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOH SO MUCH FOR READING. I'LL BE STARTING ON THE OTHER FIC SOON. LOVE YALL

End Notes

I Hope You all like this new story I’m testing out :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!